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His Majesty's Shirt-Sleeves

POUSSE CAILLOUX

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Bethell, Leonard Arthur

His Majesty's Shirt-Sleeves

BY

POUSSE CAILLOUX

. . . "Led by a few of those who know that for all the guff that has been written about the King's coat, it isn't a patch on His Majesty's shirt-sleeves."—LOST SEPOYS.

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TO

A. G. H.,

but for whose kindly encouragement much of what follows would probably never have been written.

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His Majesty's Shirt-Sleeves.

I.

LOST SEPOYS.

TAKE the Map of India and look at the top right-hand corner, as far as you can push a searching finger. The limits of the Empire fade out in a tangle of spurs and buttresses of the main Himalayan wall, running all ways at once and intersected by mighty rivers. Many of these are dotted and vague; all of them wander away into the northern and eastern blankness; all are at some time or other crossed with the attractive and convenient word 'unexplored.' One river, however, marches along with some show of confidence, disdaining dots and working its way through the main Himalayan chain to meet the acknowledged line of the Tsang-po. Joined up, cartographers call it the Brahmaputra; and, one may say at the outset, the more we get to know of it the less does that pompous and uninterrupted line across the map seem justified. But that is a long story. For the moment the defined line serves our purpose, to mark a limit and coin a name.

Till recently, the ground 'north of the river' was a no-man's-land—a welter of jungle and streams, pathless, unproductive, good-for-nothing.

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The home of several tribes whose reputation lay in everything unpleasant and nothing attractive; hardy sub-montane savages, armed with primitive but deadly war-tools, credited with jungle-lore and tenacity in fight; often aggressive, always defiant; savages who, in the past fifty years, had several times cheerfully hurrooshed out of their country the small punitive expeditions that had attempted to penetrate it, and had reduced the local prestige of the Sirkar to ± O.

Of these, by far the most intractable were the Abors, who, one day, crowned a long history of aggressiveness with the treacherous murder of two British officers. Whereupon the Sirkar made up its mind to flatten them out, once for all.

Troops, guns, and mules arrive on all shapes and sizes of river steamers, and land on a jungle-covered sandbank by the river's edge, where they find a stockade manned by a detachment of that cheery, over-worked, enterprising force of semi-Mongolian irregulars—the Military Police; whence a foot-path leads into the unknown, tunnelling through the over-arching jungle. Somewhere up that path, away across the plain and up into foothills, another body of Military Police are poking and prying around, cheerfully independent of support and scantily supplied with the necessaries of life. They are trying to find a way through the hills to the trouble that lies beyond, and are prepared to take on the mischief single-handed when found.

The force on the river bank rolls itself together and heaves ponderously through the jungle, tied as it is to the narrow track opened out by its irregular forerunners. It is as though some weighty mass of iron were compelled by lateral pressure to ooze its volume out into a seemingly endless

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length of wire, resuming its shape and bulk wherever room for expansion be found. Slowly but surely, it rolls forward. The Abors sit behind massive stockades on their chosen positions, and chew their nails with impatience. Everything is ready to the last detail, war-tools sharpened, arrows freshly poisoned, stone-shoots and booby-traps in position; the only thing lacking is the attacking force which approaches with such irritating deliberation. Presently it arrives, flattening out stockade after stockade, and penetrates into the heart of the mischief. The murderers are rounded up and court-martialled; headmen of tribes are arrested, hand-cuffed, hustled about, lodged at night in the quarter-guard and other uncomfortable places, dug out again, questioned, put back again, re-arrested, stared at, photographed in groups, and their thumb impressions taken; whence they are returned, breathless and shorn of dignity, to their tribesmen, who blame them for the general débacle. All very salutary and likely to leave a lasting impression: a headman's personal discomforts mean more to him than the destruction of half his tribe, and are far more likely to ensure future good-behaviour

Meanwhile the Sappers, freed at last from the military restrictions that have hampered them hitherto, buzz about the hills with small escorts, and do wonders with theodolite and plane-table. They are pressed for time, and heartily curse the weather when it shuts down in grey mist and rain, hiding the hilltops which mean so much to their bases and intersections, and threatening to annul their labours in the short while at their disposal before the Force must go down again. For soon the winter will be over and the rains will arrive, when no man, certainly no native of

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down-country India, may work in these jungles and live. So the Force, ponderously as it unwound itself, now winds itself up again. The base camp on the river bank hums with life. The Sappers come hurrying in from half a dozen different directions, almost the rearguard of the Force; the Expedition melts away down river, meeting, as it goes, the first hot breath of advancing summer from the plains below.

The country is 'pacified'; the traditions of unpunished aggression are wiped away; the map is the richer by an odd thousand square miles where before was a blank; the frontier has taken a step forward.

II.

Just as that efficient but untrammelled irregular force, the Military Police, were first on the scene, so, naturally, they take over the new country when the main Expedition has left. Two hundred of them hold the country in a hill-fort and two plains-stockades.

A quaint force this to the casual eye. Lacking in many of the *agréments* of soldiering, its composition leaves nothing to be desired in point of effectiveness. The men are Gurkhas, whom the jungle and the ever-present chance of a row suit to a T. They are armed with that wonderful old weapon the Martini, which hits such a mighty ding at both ends, and the simple mechanism of which is the delight of the man who, as frequently happens, sleeps in a couple of inches of water; equipped, as the French Foreign Legion are equipped, with the maximum of weight-carrying with the minimum of impaired efficiency on the march; for—whether it be in the desert of Africa or the jungles of Assam

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—that force is best which can move with the least transport; and it is the boast of the Military Police that they can march, live, sleep, and fight for ten days on end without any transport at all. Included in the ranks are trained carpenters, smiths, boatmen, gunners for the couple of mountain-guns they carry, signallers, scouts. All are born shikaris and frontiersmen, and could pick up a living in the least promising surroundings. A cheery force and very cheap, their lives lie mostly outside cantonments. Led by a few of those who know that for all the guff that has been written about the King's coat, it isn't a patch on His Majesty's shirt-sleeves.

In three forts, therefore; or rather a hill-fort and two stockades down below, to look after a new bit of frontier and keep the late enemy from recrudescing—

> ". . . to make our wars,
> And keep our laws,
> And live on yellow peas"—

which is very much what happens. A doctor, a political, and an M.P.-walla, each has his own job, thereby minimising the ever-present risk among a few white men cut off from civilisation together, that of quarrelling among themselves. They are connected with the outer world by some thirty miles of jungle-path leading down to the river, where a stern-wheeler calls weekly and the battalion elephants keep connection.

The summer is well on. The rain falls in a solemn continual swish. The jungle drips. The hill-streams bustle past on their rocky beds. Mist and damp and the smell of rotting vegetation lie like a blanket over all. Put on a waterproof and sou'-wester and come for a stroll round the Fort.

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The walls are made of up-ended logs, loopholed at intervals, flanked with bastions where the sentries stand. Doorways of ponderous beams, also loopholed. A barbed-wire entanglement all round. There are also log-built gun-platforms where stand the two mountain guns, sheeted with tarpaulins against the rain. The rows of huts where the garrison lives are part planking, part thatch, part split bamboo, and are covered with waterproof canvas against any danger of fire-arrows from the surrounding jungle. All very solid and snug, you will say; but the all-encroaching damp gets into your very bones after a bit, and it is not easy to keep the men fit except during the spells of fine weather. They are sitting about now, smoking and cleaning the damp off their accoutrements.

Come back to the mess for tea; a hut like the men's, but a bit more snug inside, with camp furniture and the Political's crockery. We will have tea on the verandah—less stuffy than indoors—and watch the rain.

Halfway through tea two drenched figures appear, sepoys from the nearer stockade down below. One of them produces a sopping chit from the Subadar to say that the elephant convoy has arrived minus two of the escort. They seem to have gone missing at the halfway camp from the river, two days before. They are believed to have gone after shikar, and have not yet turned up; they are presumably lost in the jungle.

Crumbs! Bad go, this. We pitch some kit together and leave it for the orderly to bring along; climb into sou'-wester and mackintosh, and tramp down the streaming hillsides, till, at nightfall, we slop into the stockade and the Political's hut. A long pull of Pilsener, and then

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we call up the Subadar. Interviewed by the light of a lantern, he, the elephant mahouts, the N.C.O. of the escort, all have the same story. "We halted at Pillung (the halfway spot) two days ago: riflemen Man Singh and Chetradhoj were missing when we started, and we do not know where they are unless they went shooting in the jungle. Their rifles and ammunition are also missing."

Bad, very bad: but no time to allot blame to those responsible. First thing is to find the men. Jungle knowledge tells us of the hideous dangers men run when lost in the twilight tangle; bad enough at the best of times, their case is all but hopeless in this grey August downpour. With all sense of direction lost, they have no sun, no compass, no trend of the ground to guide them: everywhere the pathless tangle. And then the leeches: it is well said of the Abor leech that, but for being striped lengthwise instead of crosswise, he in all respects resembles a tiger. Lord, these leeches! We know them: bloodthirsty, ubiquitous, they cling to your legs as you wade through the undergrowth, they swarm on arms and chest wherever you brush along, they drop on you from the trees above, till presently you are covered with them. You stop to scrape them off, and more come, till you give it up and push along covered with sucking glutinous blobs.

Not much hope for lost men in such a jungle? But we must try. Call up the senior havildar, a tough old specimen. "Parade your section at 2 A.M. at the Quarter Guard: four days' cooked rations: 150 rounds: no blankets: run along and get all the sleep you can,—you won't get much after to-night. And send the Hospital Babu." The Hospital Assistant is there already, waiting outside the circle of lantern light. "Hey, Babu-ji;

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we'll want quinine, permanganate crystals, bandages, carbolic 1 in 40, six tins of milk, and some Brand's essence; in a quarter of an hour, please." He trots off. Come and dine. All is square for the morrow; remains grub and sleep.

Poor grub: poorer sleep, thinking of those leech-sucked unfortunates somewhere down there in the jungle.

2 A.M., and we seem to have slept five minutes. The Political is up already, and has a brew of hot cocoa to warm the inner man. Cram the Doctor Babu's neat packages into your rucksack, buckle on revolver and kukri, munch a biscuit. Subdued movement outside, as the havildar and his section fall in under the drenching rain. Fretful grunting and squelching from farther on,—one of the battalion elephants, who comes with us much against her will. She must carry back the two lost men if we find them; they will be in the last stage of exhaustion, hence the milk and Brand's essence. Swing out of the fort by lantern light, and down the winding path southwards: best foot forward: keep closed up: if you fall out we can't stop for you, and the leeches will get you.

On and on, an interminable night march. The jungle alongside has been cut back far enough to prevent the leech-haunted plants from brushing you. But the over-arching roof throws back the lantern light; the trees drip and patter; the mould squelches underfoot. Hours of it. The forest is full of sounds unheard in daylight: a barking deer explodes in an unexpected 'wow' ten yards off; a sambhar crashes through the undergrowth, and you realise he has been watching the approach of the lantern for some minutes; pigs grunt; a hornbill flaps his way out of a tree overhead, bringing a shower of raindrops from the

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branches; and once, very far off, a leopard coughs discontentedly.

Day dawns, and the twilight gives us view of the path: we stumble into the small clearing of the halfway halt and sit ourselves down in one of the thatched mahout-shelters. The small store of dry firewood is unearthed; presently tea is brewing in a saucepan. An Abor appears from somewhere and squats down by the fire. We chat to him about the weather and the crops, lest a too-sudden broaching of our mission should turn hostile his very rudimentary wits. Presently he gathers, *inter alia*, that two of our sepoys are missing in the jungle, and we want the help of the neighbouring Abor village to find them. He trots off cheerfully enough to give word to the headman. Eager though we are to start off again at once, we turn in for a couple of hours' sleep before the village arrives.

9 A.M., and the huts are full of rank humanity; the Abors have arrived, and sit about in silent groups. We wake up and interview the headman, remarks prefaced by the present of a dollop of sticky opium by way of establishing confidence. A man is found who knows which way the sepoys started out; his information is of value, since he saw them start *west*wards from the line of a certain small river; which, again, we know runs north and south. That limits the ground to be searched; the men must still be westwards; they would have found their way back if they had struck the stream again. More careful questioning, and much drawing of diagrams on the mud floor, elicits two other important facts: five miles westward a moderately large river also flows roughly southwards, too deep to be crossed; furthermore, a broad belt of cultivation makes a clearing

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in the jungle almost connecting the two rivers, about half a mile south of where we sit. The fourth side of the parallelogram is formed by the foothills we left yesterday afternoon.

Right: look here then: draw another picture on the floor. Here's the whole thing: it works out to an area of jungle of about thirty square miles. They are in there, somewhere. The havildar and sepoys have followed the reasoning carefully all the while. The men grin hopefully; but the old havildar knows that the patch will be just as puzzling were it thirty acres, and looks as glum as ever.

We split the party in two, the havildar with one, ourselves with the other; the Abors are equally allotted, and a plan of campaign formed. We will search together as far as the tracks last, and after that we will split, the havildar going thus (scratches on the diagram), and ourselves so (more scratches). Thereby we will quarter our end of the patch thoroughly, and if the lost men are still alive they will answer our signal shots. A hurried note is written to the doctor and the Political, with a rough map of the ground and a request that they will do the same their end. An Abor goes off at a jog-trot: by mid-day that patch of jungle should contain six separate parties, who will quarter the ground east and west, north and south.

Come along then. We squelch out into the rain: an Abor leads the line, and we dive into the jungle. In the first hundred yards every man has his kukri out, cutting his way. The Abor worms his way along, picking up small signs which we could never see, all but obliterated as they are by the incessant downpour. We leave a well-marked lane behind us, almost a tunnel: the vegetation is so thick that when we cut through a

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sapling it must be done twice—once near the root, once at shoulder-height: the trunk falls away, but the head and upper branches remain suspended. Tangled creepers criss-cross on the ground, tripping us up at every step. Whippy branches released by the man in front flick back across face and chest. Put your head down and barge along, no time to swear. Push through wherever you can, don't cut; you'll have your fill of hacking before night-fall. Save every energy and think hard, keep on thinking; we are the brains of the show, and the others may do the work: the lives of the lost sepoys depend on our wits. Glance at the compass. Right. The Abor is still going westward. A patch of clearer jungle and we step along more briskly, neck and back for the moment relieved of the intolerable ache that comes with constant stooping. The line fetches up with a bump; the leading Abor has stopped. What is it? "Here is where your sepoys came for shikar, sahib: it is pig-ground. Look." He points to where pig have been rooting in the boggy soil for a kind of wild potato which grows here. On a tree-trunk close by is a slanting gash made by a boar's tush. More signs farther on. Somebody picks up an empty cartridge case, half-trodden into the mush. That tells a story, though no cheering one: the lost men fired at a pig: they wounded it, for if they'd killed it there would be signs of a gralloched carcass: they followed the wounded animal. Whither? Wait a bit while the Abors cast round for fresh signs. We speak in whispers, nobody knows why: possibly it is the dim twilight in which we move. Presently an Abor finds a sign or two; tracks underfoot have long been obliterated, but here is a freshly broken plantain frond, and a few spiny hairs still sticking to a tree-trunk. Go cautiously now; our

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lost men will have followed that pig in utmost silence, which means they will not have hacked their way but will have wormed through the jungle, and that leaves us next to nothing to go by. Look at the compass. Due north. Swear softly; every fresh change of direction confuses. Put the Abors ahead, and, the rest of you, hack merrily as you go: we'll need a good path if we are to carry those unfortunates in, and anyhow we'll be thankful for it ourselves when we return in the evening.

The jungle closes in again. Dim light becomes gloom. And here we have the leeches.

Noiseless, and imperceptible at first, they glue themselves on to necks, arms, bare knees: the first you know of them is when you raise your head and see them sticking to the neck of the man in front of you: then feel your own: a dozen blobs meet your touch: your forearm is covered with them: your knees, when you glance down, are black with them. Don't pull them off: a leech will let himself be torn in two before he lets go: take your kukri and shave down the skin, the leeches will come away on the blade. The sepoy behind clears your neck, while you perform the same office for the man in front. But, as you stop to do so, a dozen others fix themselves on to you. Don't wait: push along: you can't help it, so grin and bear it. Furthermore, wherever you've cleared a leech off, the little puncture he leaves will run blood for some minutes afterwards, and that attracts more of them. Hands, knees, neck are presently crimson, though the process is painless for the moment.

Presently the column halts: a whispered message from the Abor in front shows he has for some time lost all tracks: call up the havildar, and come along to the front.

From here starts the real job of searching. The

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previous orders to the havildar are gone over again: he must move thus and thus, while we go so and so. He has his compass—we have ours. Briefly, he is to go due west, while we go north and west, to rendezvous on the river which forms the westward boundary of our limits, thereby enclosing a large patch of jungle between the two parties: every few minutes each party is to fire off four signal-shots in quick time and regular interval: if anything less than four shots come in answer, then it is our lost men, since they have only two rifles, and whoever hears it must make straight for the sound. All clear? Right, push along then.

The two parties separate, and are swallowed up by the jungle. In a moment it is as though neither had existed, so solid are the green walls which shut us in. The Abors tail out at the end of the column; now that they have lost all tracks, it is only the sahib and his compass can show the way. Ten minutes of this and it is time to commence shooting. The line halts and four sepoys raise their rifles skyward. Four bangs in slow succession. Wait and listen. Pattering of rain on the jungle above, but no other sound. Wait again. Nothing. Jerk out the empty cases and push along. A minute or two, and a muffled report from somewhere on our left: instantly everyone is motionless: ah!—two, three, four; it's the havildar's party. Listen for an answer. None. Push along.

Hacking, stumbling, we make slow headway: halt every now and then to count our party and see that nobody has strayed: consult the compass: fire four shots: wait and listen. On again. Drenched through with perspiration, soaked in the incessant rain, arms aching with continual kukri-work, everyone is a mass of leeches by now. No matter: we are all cheery; and if only we could

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get some sort of answer from those two unfortunates, the experience would be almost enjoyable, so novel it is. But the job of hunting for a needle in a haystack is no luxury when the needle is a couple of men who *must* be found or they die. No pleasant death, no quick death, but a death part hunger, part slow draining of life's blood by loathsome leeches, wholly despairful.

We turn westward now: the havildar's shots have long been almost imperceptible, and we must keep touch. Presently the two parties converge and the western river is reached. No need to ask "What luck?" Ten minutes' rest: there is no temptation to stay longer where there is nowhere to sit down and the leeches have smelt us. We agree on new compass bearings for the return search and separate again, keeping farther northwards this time. A new stretch of jungle is enclosed between the two parties. Hack, struggle, and stumble; halt, go on again; hack and hack; we act as an animated snow-plough, cutting through the solid sappy obstruction in front, leaving a made path behind. Every such path is of value; the lost sepoys may happen across one of them and they'll know we made it; it will lead them back to camp. Halt for more signal-shots: one, two, three, four—wait a bit. Faint and far away to the north comes the answer: one, two, three, four. Good, very good: that must be the Political's lot; so he and the Doctor are busy. Again, closer, the havildar answers. Presently, away to the northwest, four muffled bumps tell of the Doctor's left wing searching the northern river reaches. But never the longed-for two shots.

On and on through the afternoon: the twilight deepens to gloom: we must push campwards. The signal-shots converge, and, as night falls, we join up at the huts: drenched with warm rain, salt

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with perspiration, wholly weary, we take stock of the day's doings.

No better plan can be devised than that of to-day; we must just go on quartering the jungle till we find our men, or till we are reluctantly forced to admit that they are dead. A roaring fire is made, and the sepoys strip: the havildar and ourselves slightly apart, since the slight social distinctions which discipline compels obtain even here. In pairs we scrape the full-fed leeches off one another; an empty kerosine tin is filled with water and heated on the fire; a strong brew of permanganate is made in it; with this we swob one another's bites, which have now started to itch intolerably; the irritation soon giving place to a grateful tingle as the chemical gets to work. Don't scratch, whatever you do; let the poison soak out. The leech, when he bites, injects at the same time a small quantity of irritating liquid which sets up an inflammation, and so increases the local blood-flow; this is what causes the intense itching afterwards. The strong permanganate cleans the wounds and stops the itching. All finished? Right. Fall in for quinine. This is a necessary form of drill. If left to themselves the happy-go-lucky Gurkhas would omit the precaution, and we can't afford fever cases. Walk down the line; give each man ten grains; watch him swallow it —we take no chances.

The hut is full of steam from drying garments. Presently all are clothed again; we sit about, cleaning rifles and putting a new edge on to our blunted kukris for the morrow's work. The Abors are told to turn up at daylight, and fade off down the path. Hot grub, and turn in. The crazy thatch leaks in a dozen places; the wet wood makes more smoke than warmth; the ground we lie on is sodden through and through. Squalor

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and misery, you say? Think how far better off we are than those two poor fellows out there—*if they are still alive:* the thought recurs persistently, but is pushed away. We will find them somehow.

Next day, and we cast southward. The jungle here is under water, and we wade knee-deep all day. The leeches are, if anything, worse, and we find a hopeless weariness creeping on towards evening: the endless blood-letting is having its effect. Never mind: better luck to-morrow.

Five men have swollen legs next morning, festering sores showing where the permanganate has failed to annul the leech-poison. Now for the 1 in 40 carbolic; bind them up and tell them what to do for themselves; the rest of us start out once more. Cast north-west to-day; we'll try and join up with the Doctor's party.

Evening comes, and no success. We can barely drag ourselves along, and one of the men has to be helped for the last mile. By this time the idea of failure is in everybody's mind. The men we are searching for have been lost for six days; what earthly chance can they have? Never mind: try again to-morrow.

The morrow, and one last effort. It is a very listless party which emerges into the downpour at dawn: half the men are left *hors de combat,* and the rest of us are feeling pretty anæmic. The Abors have refused outright to come with us any more: never mind, we can get on without them. One last day of endless hacking and signal-shots.

By evening we know we have done our best, and by no human possibility can the lost sepoys be alive. They have been lost for a week now: hunger, exposure, and the thousands of leeches will have done their work; and yet it seems hard to give up. But the needle is still in the haystack; we have criss-crossed it with a cat's cradle

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of paths, where before was virgin jungle; we have dotted the thirty square miles with empty cartridge cases; we are on our last legs and will have some trouble in getting back to the stockade; we have done our best. And yet we know that, but for those cursed leeches, we would have found them.

Back to the stockade, then, where the Political, equally weary, has a dinner and bed for us. A double ration of rum for the men; one more quinine parade, and dismiss. Strip and get between dry blankets once more.

Presently, as we are dropping off to sleep, from the edge of the clearing rises a single wailing note. Phee-e-e. Ah-h-h-h. Ha-a-a-a. Huana-a-a. Huaná huaná huaná-há-há-há-há. The single voice is joined by others—one, two, six, a dozen—individual notes merging gradually into the piercing dirge of a full jackals' chorus. We look across at the Political, who is brushing his teeth in a corner of the shanty, and who listens, brush poised in mid-air. He nods—"Jackals, my word; jackals. Why, there are *no* jackals north of the river?" There haven't been, so far, or we should have heard these camp visitants long ago.

We call up the Abor boy who chops wood and carries water, and between whiles teaches the Political the way through the maze of clicks and gutturals which makes the Abor language. "What about them jackals, sonnie? We've never heard 'em before?" He looks sheepish, stands on one leg, and pensively scratches its calf with the toes of the other. "It's your sepoys, sahib. You'll not find them now. The last time we heard jackals was just after the Kebang folk murdered W—— sahib, a year ago. You'll not hear them again." No more we have.

But there are *no* jackals north of the river: it's a natural history fact.

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It sounds superstitious, of course, but to some of us who live in the waste places of the earth it would sometimes seem as if Dame Nature drew aside the veil that hides her mysteries—giving us a glimpse into the unknown laws which make a separate realm in the sphere beyond. The clear, faint, bell-like note that drifts across the frozen wastes of Tibet on a still cold night, coming who knows whence. The song of the sand you may sometimes hear in the Saharan desert at nightfall, when the sands beneath and the clear air above are penetrated with a thin æolian music, very faint and sweet. The rush and tumble of a waterfall in some parts of the jungle, splash, roar, and splash, where you know never a drop of water is. The queerness of the divining rod in the hands of the 'dowser.' The power some men have of 'feeling the north,' as though some microscopic compass-needle swung freely under their skill. The behaviour of that ubiquitous nuisance the black corbie-crow, who, wherever you meet him, flies north as night comes on.

What does it all mean?

Next morning, the same sheets of rain, and a well-earned dose of malaria. The stockade is silent under the blanket of fog, and we lie abed 'a-thinkynge.'

A month later a wandering Abor found our sepoys' bodies, quite by chance: or rather, what the leeches had left of them. We gave their bones fitting burial, with volley, bugle, and shroud, lest the Abors should think we shuffle our dead underground without ceremony. They were lying not half a mile from where we had been searching, and so must have been already dead when we commenced our search.

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II.

PLUCK, AND SOME COOLIES.

My friendship with Halford of the Bengal Lancers began when he stumbled into my camp in a Himalayan valley bottom ; he was gaunt with starvation, having failed to do himself well enough in tinned stores, and having shot nothing eatable. His following were in no better case. So I and mine took him and his to our bosom and fed them for a week, till they were fit to travel again. Whereupon our roads parted—I to go forward on my year's furlough, over the hills and far away to the Roof of the World, he to scramble back over the passes to his grilling Plains station before his three months' leave was up. I remember he took with him a china pot of French mustard and a jar of Stilton, both of them luxuries his soul loved, and enough spare grub to see him as far as the nearest available supplies. So we parted in the middle of Badoul. That was many years ago, and we had not met since, though the old blighter had written to me sometimes, and still declares I saved his life, which is improbable—he being constructed of equal parts whipcord and sound bone.

So I went and saw him in Millbank—flattened out in bed and moderately cheerful, though his knees will never grip a Waler again, his squadron

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will see him no more, and the small amount of walking he will ever do will never carry him after red bear or ibex. We welcomed one another as men will, and talked till I was turned out. A second and a third day, and then he told me the following story, which, as an example of the sheer pluck of a good woman, beats anything I have yet heard. It shall go down as he told it, and I hope the convincing simplicity of his words will help the reader to realise the truth of the story—as it certainly did me.

We will leave out the inverted commas, and listen to him as he talked, flattened out in bed in Millbank Hospital in the grey of a late November afternoon in 1915, both knees shattered, and all his splendid activity gone for ever.

II.

You remember when I left you at Mondla, and stepped out southwards with more on my bones than I brought into your camp? You *did* do me well! All right, don't let's talk about it, then; but I want to tell you what happened afterwards. I made a full march that evening, and on to the upper end of the Bhotang Pass next day. There the old Lama, who lives in the joss-house up the *khud*,[1] met me and asked me to shoot him a few snow-pigeon, old fraud, and said he would pray for me. Lot of good the prayers of a meat-eating Lama would do anyone—what? Anyhow, I was tired, and he followed me to the rest-house at the foot of the Bhotang, talking all the way. When we got to the shelter he told me that a sahib, very sick, and a memsahib, had arrived there two

[1] Angl.=cliff-face.

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days before, the sahib carried in a *dandy*[1] by eight or nine Sulu coolies from the other side of the Pass; the memsahib on foot, a Hindustani servant, and their kit on coolies. They'd had the devil of a time crossing the Pass, taking twelve hours to do the three miles, and had arrived pretty well done up, especially as the afternoon wind had got them near the top, and had nearly done for the whole party: no joke at 14,000 feet on snow. Next day, instead of taking it easy, nothing would content the memsahib but to pack up and do the whole ghastly journey back again—the sahib in the dandy as before, and the Hindustani servant furious. It didn't matter to the coolies so much; they'd have had to get back anyhow. Still, there it was: they'd disappeared up the snow slopes yesterday and vanished. Mad, mad, why couldn't they have sat and rested a bit? But the memsahib would have it, and she'd a will for ten.

I let the old blighter chatter on till Karim Khan brought in tea, and then closed the conversation with a couple of rupees. He blessed me, and went off twirling his prayer-wheel. Early dinner, and turned in, the stars being out and a clear sky for an early start on the morrow. Vega and Altair straight overhead, very bright, and Arcturus blazing like a fire above the camp where I'd left you. Cassiopeia, I remember, was perched on the top end of the glacier on the north side of the valley. In fact, the whole bag of tricks looking bright and friendly, and master very tired.

Up next morning, and off before dawn: we topped the Pass by 10 A.M., and made such good going down the far slopes that we dropped into the trees again on the other side by 2. I don't know

[1] A canoe-shaped litter with transverse poles, carried by reliefs of four coolies at a time.

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whether it was the reduced altitude or what, but I was feeling very fit, and only waited there half an hour for the kit to come up. Told Karim Khan to give the coolies a rest, and then to bring on the kit ten miles to Tarauli after me. He said he'd be in by dark. Right, push along then.

By dusk I was down among the deodars and within a mile of Tarauli bungalow—when I rounded a corner and came on a group of coolies sitting in the middle of the path sucking a hookah by turns, their loads dumped on the *khud*-side. Ten yards farther on I came on a dandy in the pathway, the occupant reclining in it and covered by a loose mosquito-net against the flies, and a memsahib sitting on the ground alongside, talking to him in a dull monotone. I was on to them before she saw me. She looked up suddenly, and I saw written there pain and tragedy which almost made me cry out in pity. A moment she stared at me, white-faced and drawn; then her head dropped into her hands, and she began to cry—big dry sobs, getting more and more violent as she rocked herself to and fro, and shook the dandy against which she was leaning till I thought it would tip over. Instinctively I looked at the occupant, expecting him to do something, but he made no move. Asleep? Ill? Anyhow, I had to do something: this ghastly woe was more than a human being could watch unmoved.

I went up to her and patted her shoulder, clumsily enough, I expect, and talked soothingly, asking her what was up, and all that. After a bit she got a grip on herself, and choked back her sobs, and said she was in need of help very badly, and would I come along the path a bit and she'd tell me all about it. We went out of sight of the coolies and sat on the path edge, and she told me

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the whole business—and a damned bad business it was, though the whole of my thoughts from beginning to end were taken up with marvelling at the stout-hearted woman whose dry husky voice unfolded the tragedy step by step.

It appears he was a Captain man in the —th, getting near his majority. They'd been married six years when he developed phthisis. He'd been a mighty hunter in his time, so that when it was a question of going somewhere out of the Plains, his soul turned instinctively to the Himalayas rather than homewards across the water. So she took him to Simla. They had a trained nurse with them whom they'd picked up somewhere: she was young—didn't take things seriously—and looked forward to Simla; she'd been reading some tosh about the things which went on there, and when they settled down she seems to have put in an undue amount of time gadding, and didn't pull her weight in the team, anything like. After a month there he didn't seem to pick up much. Simla meant nothing to him, and he craved ever northwards. He was a sick man, of course, but *you* know what that craving is, don't you; you used to say you'd like to be buried up there, some day, and I know it too, though I suppose Kensal Green is all I shall ever see. Well, anyhow, he'd a craving for the snows and the big open spaces among the cedars; in the old days he'd been teasing red bear in the Kathist Nullah not a mile from where we were sitting—and he wanted the breath of the deodars in his poor tattered lungs, and the glaciers peeping over the tops of the trees, and Dame Nature walking open-faced and loose-girdled ankle-deep in the pine needles.

Lord, how he must have craved for it all!

So they packed up, and carried him northward

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and ever northward over that interminable up and down track till they got to the Sulu Valley. The nurse went with them, loathing it more and more every step they went, her heart not in her job or any nearer it than Simla. One way and another, she seems to have combined the outward semblance of a Botticelli angel with the disposition of a hyena; and when the thing culminated in an almighty row they were all of them the happier for it. She packed up and went back to Simla, while this hero woman and her man pushed on northwards. The nurse's departure and the ever-approaching snows seem to have done him good; anyhow, he began to pick up, and though he did all the marches in the dandy, he used to get up and stroll about between whiles. They got well into Sulu, and stayed a day or two at S——, where they met old B. who owns the manganese mines, and he lent them fishing tackle; and they used to potter about on the river banks and pull out snow-trout sometimes.

They wandered northwards still, till they reached Tarauli where the big deodars are, and whence you start for the Kathist Nullah, where the red bear live —or used to. He knew every inch of the ground and revelled in it all—the whoosh of the clear cold air in the deodar tops and the scented breath of the trees.

The Island valley of Avalon, indeed.

She used to read to him 'Vanity Fair' and 'Lorna Doone' and other old favourites; one way and another, what with returning hope and health and the quiet and peace of it all, it seems to have been more like heaven than anything else for them, poor folk. They'd both of them a taste for astronomy; he'd done some useful latitude work in his wanderings before they were married,

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and they used to lie out after dark while he counted over the constellations and taught her the names, and they had mild jokes about them. (The big Alphacca in Corona Borealis she used to call alpaca, being a woman, as he said.) And in the big Hindu temple across the valley the conches brayed and the bells clanged and the self-centred Sulu men—each of whom considers himself the equal of a Brahmin—flitted about like ghosts among the deodar trunks, silent-footed on the pine needles, going and coming round the meaningless mysteries of the temple.

Well; they stayed there in perfect peace and growing health well on into the summer till the rains broke, and all their wonderful surroundings went out in a mist which lay like a blanket over everything. A week of this and he began to cough again. It was soon plain that he could not stay where he was. With Simla and all that was awful behind them, and his lungs tearing him to bits where he lay, they simply had to push on. In front of them, two marches away, towered the main wall of the Himalaya, beyond which, as they both knew, no rain penetrated: a dry elevated land shut off from the rains of India by the mighty wall of ice and rock formed by the Abode of Snow.

Dry, high, treeless, with sterile air, the cold desert called to them insistently in this place of heavy mist and dripping trees where his worn-out lungs laboured.

It was a big job, but something had to be done. One march would bring them to the bottom of the Bhotang Pass; the next day, with a heave and a big push, would with luck take them through that treacherous snow-covered gap, the only breach in the barrier for scores of miles east and west. So they gathered in coolies, some from the

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temple precincts over the way, some from the village, and trekked. He lay in his dandy covered by a mosquito-net against the infernal flies that come with the rains, and she tramped alongside chatting to him for companionship sake, though he answered her but little, having other work for his scanty breath. At the bottom of the Pass they halted for the night. They should have started before dawn next morning, so as to be over the worst of it before the afternoon wind made a blizzard of the snow-surface; but she didn't know and he'd forgotten. Anyhow, their Hindustani servant was late with the breakfast and they didn't start much before 9 A.M. They got in at 9 P.M. after a ghastly time, as the Lama said. She kept him going with two Thermos flasks of hot tea—one should have been hers—and when they dropped into the rest-house at Moksar there wasn't much to be done except creep into bed.

The thin dry air was cold as the ice it blew from: she piled the cut juniper-wood high in the grate and made a blaze, and heaped the blankets and eider-downs on him as he lay in bed, and said her prayers and crept in alongside him and tucked him up to keep him warm. She says he went to sleep with his head on her shoulder, drowsy as a child and thanking her for all her goodness to him. She woke early next morning to find him dead in bed alongside her.

After her first unavailing efforts to wake him, sheer bewilderment seems to have seized her. Helpless and alone in a deserted land, with a following of one untrustworthy Hindustani servant and a score of coolies—her man lying dead before her and the nearest white help down in Sulu, across that wall of snow,—her brain was numb with the shock of it all. I wonder what you and

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I would have done? Well, yes, she did that too, but not for long; she'd a brave woman's notion that Heaven helps those who help themselves. All the splendid pluck and perseverance which had upheld her through the past months was with her still, even though the object of it all lay dead.

Her first thought, and the thought that abode with her through the next forty-eight hours, was that at all costs she must hide the fact from the ultra-Hindu coolies and the weak-kneed Mussulman who shared their smoky hut at the end of the compound. For if they got an inkling of the catastrophe, the coolies, being Hindus of high caste—though, indeed, of no morals,—would flee from the presence of the dead man and leave her stranded. Plain damnation, in this world and in the next, would be the lot of a Hindu who touched or carried a dead body. And she *must* get him back, if only to get help and give him decent burial.

What happened next she can give a clear account of. She dressed, and, with infinite labour, she dressed him too. Then she called down to the servant and told him to bring breakfast. He brought it—the two breakfasts. She took the tray from him at the door, saying the sahib still slept and would awake presently. And then, to my mind, the crowning achievement: lest any suspicion should arise from the untouched food, that marvellous woman, whose heart was as a stone within her and whose very being revolted from what lay on the table before her, waded solidly through the double breakfast and put the plates back on the tray. She called the servant, gave him back the tray at the door, and told him to have the coolies ready to go back, as the sahib did not like the new place they had come to.

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Then she hauled in the dandy from where it had been put, in the dressing-room, overnight; and, exerting all her strength, she lifted him into it. His great frame was lighter than you'd have thought to look at him; he was nothing but skin and bone, poor chap. She tucked him up with rugs and drew the mosquito-curtain over him. She packed the bags, folded the night things, strapped up the bedding; and, when all was square, knelt once more and prayed, as she says, not to God but to him, her husband, wherever he might be, to look down on her and uphold her courage through what was coming, and to blind the eyes of the cowardly scoundrels of her following, on whose credulity she was going to play.

Then she called up the coolies; the loads were handed out and tied up; the first four of the eight dandy-coolies came into the room and lifted their burden.

Somehow, she knows not how, they got back across the Pass. The only thing she has any recollection of is walking beside her man's dandy and talking to him, as she always used to do, and, whenever a halt was called, tucking him up. When, at dusk, they reached the rest-house at the lower end of the Pass, he was carried into her room and left. She ordered the sahib's invalid food—the nauseous concoctions which are called invalid food in India, 'custard bake,' and so forth—and, as before, she made a clean sweep of both meals. That night she got what sleep she could, rolled up in blankets on the floor alongside the dandy. She says she couldn't face the bed; she couldn't move him, since by now the poor wasted limbs were frozen and rigid, and she had a terror lest someone should discover him as he was.

Morning dawned, and she crept to her feet more

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dead than alive. The whole pitiful pantomine was gone through again. Downhill now, the snow giving place to the rough going of the mountain path. She walked beside him once more, and chatted merrily—scraps—and when she could find nothing more to say, told the coolies to stop their chatter as the sahib slept.

On and on, her bodily strength only upheld by the wonderful courage in her, her whole soul centred in the one object—to get him back to Tarauli, where she could count on white help again and white man's burial for her beloved. The last halt before the straight run in was where I'd met her; and here, with my coming, her last strength had given way and she could keep up the acting no longer.

Thankful and thankful was I that I'd come up with her, though, in truth, the only help I could give was to carry on her perfect arrangements. And just then, by the luck of Providence, up the path came old W., who retired from the Service many years ago, and who grows such first-rate apples for the Indian market. I gave him an outline of the catastrophe, and begged him to take her on to his house and get his wife to look after her while I brought in the remainder of the cortège. She went with him, dully acquiescent, and I promised not to be long behind them. Luckily all this happened out of sight of the coolies, and when I gave the order to start they shouldered the dandy without a suspicion.

Next morning old W.'s four stout sons and I dug a grave for him in the big clump of deodars above the river bank, all among the pine needles, and we buried him, W. lending me his prayer-book.

There he lies, under the deodars and facing the snows he loved so well.

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I handed the head Brahmin of the temple a substantial tip, and he put up a purification ceremony for the eight scoundrels, who by now knew what they'd been carrying and were ready to make trouble over lost caste. They deserved less than nothing; but their feminine howls were spoiling the atmosphere of the bravest deed I ever knew, and I wanted the doer of that deed to have a day or two at peace with her dead.

She didn't want to move, but three days later I got her to accompany me back. We avoided the Simla route, branched off at S., and crossed the Labbu Pass into Ruket and so down to the railway at Paharikot. Thence she got back to the regiment, and so home eventually.

We sent in a proper headstone afterwards, all the way by coolies. Old W., who is a good friend —you know he and my dad were at Eton together —had it properly fixed.

But the abiding monument to him is the magnificent courage of the pluckiest woman—or man—I ever knew.

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III.

MOVABLE COLUMNS.

PEACE and privacy, most desired by men, are hard to obtain nowadays; but both may be found in the jungle—provided it is real jungle of the thick, twisted, and twilighty kind. It must also be remote.

The jungles of the farther Assam Frontier fulfil these conditions. They are hard to get at, harder to live in, hardest of all to fight in successfully. The white men who live there are decimal something to the square mile; but they stay there, and those who fall in love with it take little leave. What they do, think, and say about it is therefore little known.

The force which holds this frontier is small, but efficient. The men are Gurkhas, enlisted specially for the life, and are officered by chosen free-lances from the Indian Army. The whole comes under the Civil Estimates; and though organised, armed, and led as are Indian Army battalions, are called Military Police. This police idea saves the force from coming on the Army Estimates, and its accounts therefore escape the keen scrutiny to which politicians subject the normal fighting forces.

The frontiers of India consist either of deserts, mountain ranges, or dense belts of jungle. The

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two former are reinforced by the existence of buffer States, which are not always friendly to ourselves, but which are invariably hostile to any intruder, whether from south or from north. They may therefore be relied upon to offer such an obstacle to encroachment from Central Asia as will give time to the defenders of India to leave their scattered cantonments, and to concentrate on the edge of things. The jungle portion of the hedge is just jungle, reinforced by the mountains over which it lies like a blanket, so that the vegetation at 10,000 feet is as dense as, sometimes denser than, that of the plains. It runs in a broad swath from Sikkim in the west, round to meet Siam on the eastern border. And of it Assam is the salient and spear-point. Its hinterland is either impassable Tibet or marked 'unexplored'; in either case buffer regions effective through geography rather than in population.

It might be thought that India would be content with this, and leave it alone in its useful inertia. But it contains a fairly thick population of truculent savages; reinforcing the thicket, it is true, but needing attention to keep them from being a nuisance. Hence the Assam Military Police, its Gurkhas, and their chosen white officers. The latter run three, or at most four, to a battalion, as against the fourteen of India and the twenty-six of England; and it is a lasting tribute to the inborn soldierliness of the Gurkha that he finds the proportion sufficient.

The Gurkha of fiction is a cheerful undisciplined savage, who disdains modern weapons in favour of his kukri, and is reputed to thrive on the blood of decapitated enemies; truncated Boches, for instance, have been reported in recent years to be his favourite food. Needless to say, a mob of

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this kind would not be included in any Army List. The Gurkha of fact is certainly cheery, but, for the rest, is only a super-soldierly little specimen of the many soldierly races enlisted in the East. He is not a native of India. His own country, Nepal, runs on a martial feudal system where the primitive virtues hold sway, and efficient fighting is a national tradition. He is fully conscious of the value of modern arms, and appreciates the length of reach given by a fixed bayonet. He takes pains to be a beautiful rifle shot. His kukri, from which he is rarely parted, is a general utility tool rather than a specialised head-cutting (or, as some think, entrail-ripping) implement. Kukri, dah, machete, parang, all are typical of jungle-living peoples; with each the user slashes his way through thick and sappy undergrowth. The fact that the human body behaves in the same way as does a jungle sapling, when slashed at by the kukri, is accident more than design. The wicked-looking curve of the heavy knife is developed from the necessity of putting the weight well forward in a tool designed for a slicing cut among green growth. That is all there is in it.

Why upset the conception of the Gurkha as a specialised hired assassin? Nobody would be more indignant than he if he could understand the common report in England. He is content to combine in himself, without knowing it, some of the contradictions of the East; invincible in attack, his lack of imagination makes him wonderful in any defence, however seemingly hopeless; merry, among an Eastern population of dignified reserve, he yet loses his temper on occasion. There is a well-known Everest climber who says he would sooner take on a wounded bear than a half-drunk Gurk strolling down the Cantonment

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Mall with a kukri in his fist. He has tried both.

For the rest, the Gurkha is at his best in the jungle, his traditional home. Directed by white officers, who treat him as a brother, led in action by his own kin, surrounded by conditions as nearly as may be those of his beloved Nepal, he adds the final charm to a life which, one repeats, claims the white man, and holds him, sweaty, simple, and happy, till the end of his term of service.

II.

But come back once more to this question of peace and privacy, desired by all men and by few women. The peace we deal with was the result of a wholesome respect by the savage for the Gurkha, his equal in jungle-lore, his match at close quarters, his superior in armament. The frontier was therefore quiet, and fulfilled its requirements, a static buffer. The privacy added to it came from the unwillingness of bigwigs to come inspecting in a land of hard travelling; their consciousness of problems specialised by the jungle, and not lightly to be taken on in official letters; and the absence of telephones and telegraph in a land where an electric current would dribble down wet creepers into the ground in the first half-mile.

Peace and privacy was, on one occasion, rudely broken into by a mixed and over-busy force from India, which, for reasons outside the scope of this sketch and not in any way in question of the adequacy of the Military Police to deal with the trouble, irrupted into the jungle area. It 'took on' the local savage, blundered about with

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tremendous waste of energy and complete defiance of the local rules of warfare, left the tribes nominally subdued but actually bewildered into temporary peace, and departed six months later unwept, unhonoured, and unsung. It was a nightmare time, and the Military Police felt almost apologetic to the savages afterwards; not that there was ever any attempt at fraternising with a truculent and vindictive enemy, but the fitness of things had been upset by what had occurred, and there was a sort of 'morning-after-the-night-before' feeling on both sides, which gave tempers a length in millimetres, and complicated the work of the shirt-sleeved perspiring Political, who had previously stabilised the situation by simple and effective means, and was now faced by a state of affairs comparable to a cat in an east wind.

Briefly, the frontier was seething, and needed soothing. So the Military Police moved up, abandoning their previous quiet and watchful attitude, and stepped into the middle of things. A conference was held at the Political's bungalow at the Base, by the two dozen or so concerned, for an hour before a dinner eaten minus coats and in an atmosphere of nicknames. That was the way the peace of the frontier held best together. Lengthy screeds from the Civil Administration were read out from the top of the table, and translated into idiomatic but perfectly loyal comment by the reader. Luckily, headquarters held the administrator who best understood the peculiarly simple methods of the Political; and, stripped of official verbiage, it came to this—"Carry on; I'll back you in whatever you do."

Broad principles were then announced—as broad and clear as the big man's square bald head and slow grin. In detail, it was decided to establish

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seven stockaded posts in the heart of tribal country (" no more sniffing round the edges, you fellows "), each post commander to be directly responsible to the Political for his own particular sphere and to nobody else. " Understand that, Jimmy? You report to me; or rather, don't, unless you've anything particular to say." " Yessah," says James into his tumbler.

Now it emerged from the mass of material that headquarters " envisaged," or adumbrated, or words to that effect, " a pacification of the disturbed area by a sedentary occupation of *points d'appui* within mutually supporting distance." " And that means, you fellows, that they think it desirable to lie low and say nuffin; in fact, that our range of action should be the range of our rifles through loopholes. You know as well as I do that the only way to keep a frontier quiet is to keep it on the move. Make it so, will you? Amen, and so forth. Let's have dinner."

And we dined.

III.

Now, the least of the offences of the late Expeditionary Force had been the way it moved about the country. Entirely ignorant of jungle-fighting and disdaining local advice, it magnified the terrors of spear and poisoned arrow opposed to it; it suffered from a bewildered claustrophobia incomprehensible to those who knew the essential friendliness of thick jungle, however wet and dense; it made vast camps surrounded by chin-high abattis of pointed stakes; it posted noisy and touchy sentries; it carved great roads through the indignant jungle; it lit spluttery acetylene flares which stank to heaven and frightened the

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night-prowling game out of its five wits ; it carried impedimenta innumerable on great soggy masses of coolies, who spread themselves abroad and made whole tracts of jungle insanitary with their habits, and in competition with whom that hard-working scavenger the scarab-beetle, or 'thunder bug,' feebly waved his antennæ and gave it up ; in a word, it was an invasion by horde, a movement of nations, a De Quincey affair, which not so much broke the peace of the jungles as went for it with a hammer.

The Military Police blushed, and waited for better days.

And since the success of such an upheaval depended entirely on a similar concentration to oppose it, and since the concentration never came off, being at one with the rest of the scared and protesting jungle, the Force presently withdrew, to the great relief of all concerned.

Curiosity supervening, the movements of the tribes thereupon became, in modern tactical parlance, 'exploratory and penetrative.' A savage or two, bowed and arrowed proper, was even seen to penetrate to the Great River, standing on the bank and meditatively scratching the calf of one leg with the toes of the other. Hence the fiat went forth to the Military Police. "Right," said the Military Police, and the Political issued the necessary orders to each, torn out of the leaves of his field notebook.

IV.

The first principle of jungle fighting is 'little and often.' Short manageable columns of fifty rifles and a hundred and fifty carriers minimise

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the ever-present danger of a sudden attack in flank on a long straggly line. The visibility in normally thick jungle is about five yards, so things have to be compact if disaster is to be avoided. The well-timed and co-ordinated movements of small columns take the place of the noisy five-mile-long invasion described. The weakness of every column, however small, lies in its baggage line; so those who know keep their impedimenta down to the minimum. It is difficult: rations at least have to be carried; carriers for the fighting portion, again, need rations; more carriers are wanted to carry *them*; and more rations again, for these carriers. Big fleas have little fleas, and so forth. Luckily the infinitum comes to a stop somewhere about the fifty, hundred and fifty point; and this size of force has a normal range of one week's unsupported action. It cannot afford defeat, of course. No amount of transport would pull *that* straight; but the matter is in the hands of the Gurkha, so the question has not yet arisen.

The long sinewy native fights naked, just as he lives. His tactics, shorn of details, are a sudden flight of poisoned arrows from ambush, followed by a charge with dahs through the column, and occasionally back again. Heads are taken for trophies, and in a moment all is quiet again. The trained Gurkha sees to it that there is no ambush. It all sounds delightfully simple, but it is not.

The native lives in unfortified villages, and the jungle grows right up to his door. The few paths leading thereto are protected in war-time by pit-falls and poisoned stakes. He is vulnerable in his village only, and in his few possessions and stored rice. A match applied to a windward thatch will render a tribe homeless and foodless in ten minutes. Why he fails to fortify his village

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nobody has yet discovered. Possibly he will learn to do so in the future.

James & Co., ration strength 151, the coolies borrowed from headquarters, for the third day since leaving the Base wormed their way through the dripping twilight tangle. The general confusion and upset prevented any concentration against them, a bit of luck shared by the other six columns and calculated on by the Political when issuing his orders. Further safety lay in abandoning paths and taking frankly to the jungle, compass-led by the white man. The Gurkha is pretty safe in his sense of direction, though lamentable exceptions occur,[1] but the white officer is never without his compass; and on this occasion the direction was fairly simple. Camping compactly, without noise and with a minimum of fires, marching by untrodden ways but with every precaution, the little column found itself on the fourth evening at the jungle-covered hilltop chosen for its abiding place. Working the night through, by morning it stood safely on a clean and cleared hill, and the chance of being surprised gone for good. In successive days the force rose to 200 rifles and 600 coolies, as three other columns (these all Gurkha-led) arrived from the Base. Three days' slashing and pushing laid bare the whole hillside, and the materials for the stockade commenced to grow. In a week the defences were unassailable. Ration convoys for provisioning the post had arrived, and all non-fighters had departed under the temporarily inadequate escort of fifty rifles. But not the way they came; therein lay safety.

Now the Gurkha is a naturally handy man; but, with intensive training and sufficient civilian

[1] See "Lost Sepoys."

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tools such as could not be supplied under Army Estimates, he develops a constructive imagination equalling that of a sapper.

So while the tribesmen momentarily gave the stockade best man, huts grew and barracks sprang up. Felled trees became planks in the sawpits; grass grew into tightly thatched roofs sheeted over with tarpaulins against fire-arrows; floors were sound, and gates in the perimeter revolved surely on socketed hinges lined with ration tins, closing heavily with a wholesome bang and secured with a heavy crossbar. Perennial water ran within reach, and everything movable rose from the ground on piles, clear of damp.

Snug, safe, and compact, everything went according to Cocker and his descendant the Gurk.

Then came the *petits agréments:* privacy for N.C.O.'s, separate quarters for the Subadar and Jemadars, and a verandah for James's hut wherefrom swung two glowing specimens of the *Vanda Cærulea* orchid, found by the cook when the jungle was being cleared, and stuffed, *pro tem.*, into the fowl-crate.

In a fortnight, to quote James, it was fit for girls and a tea-fight.

Reporting by helio, All Correct, the next thing was to lay plans.

The dictum "If you want to keep a frontier quiet, you must keep it on the move," recurred with insistence. The whole area was suspiciously quiet, a fact which would probably have deceived the late lamented Hallelujah Chorus, but which to James was only a bit of that temporary luck which seemed to accompany every good bundobust the Political devised.

So James took thought and evolved a plan.

Imprimis, there were no coolies. Movement

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would therefore seem to be out of the question, unless for half a day out and the same distance back, a fiddly sort of way of translating into action the Political's broad exhortation. But one great asset lay in the lately issued rucksacks, superseding haversacks. Something could surely be managed with them.

Now Nepal is a roadless country, without wheeled traffic. Steep hill-paths run everywhere. The Gurkha is therefore accustomed from his earliest days to carrying loads on his back. An English bricklayer is forbidden, by the rules of his union, to carry more than 14 lb. in a hod; but the adult Gurkha can carry eighty, and keep on at it all day over any ground at his own pace. He ceases to be a beast of burden when he enlists, but there is nothing in the nature of things to prevent his reverting to his youthful training should, as in this instance, the occasion demand.

Could one trust him to carry a week's rations, his blanket gear, his spare clothing, his ammunition, and his fighting equipment in this dripping hot-house? Call the old Subadar. Polite noises, a seat on the verandah, and a cigarette. Explain the plan. "We want to move out without transport —to live, camp, and, if necessary, fight, for a week. The men would have to carry 60 lb. apiece, all aboard. Will they do it? Above all, will they do it swiftly and secretly, and stand a certain fire-brigade readiness for it in the preparation?"

The silence of cogitation, due less to uncertainty than to a brain slightly slow in the uptake. "Only ourselves? There will be no coolies, no onlookers? Hm-m. Yes; they can do it. Probably a fight? Why, of course they will do it." Reluctance, one sees, at losing *izzat* [1] by being observed as burden-

[1] Soldierly prestige.

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carriers, when, as the sahib is reminded, the fitness of things demands the presence of the lower orders to free the hands of the fighting man. But as the idea germinates, all reluctance vanishes, and the comic side is obvious. Take on these *junglis* on their own ground, free of the hampering tail? Wholesome laughter, caught up into a ceremonious throat-clearing and an apologetic salute. Of course. And how will it be managed?

By the end of four days things have shaped themselves. Sub-division of the garrison into the fifty toughest and a hundred stay-behinds to mind the stockade. A pigeon-holed almirah has been erected in the ration godown, each pigeon-hole stocked with a week's rations for one man—rice, dhall, tea, sugar, salt, in separate bundles neatly done up in sewn tarpaulin, and the ghee ration in a stoppered section of bamboo. A clear gangway, in one side and out the other.

The men's emptied rucksacks hang on two projecting pegs over each bed-place, a waterproof sheet and spare blanket rolled horseshoe-fashion round the top, spare jersey and socks handy, ammunition packets alongside. Each man's ration tin from the cook-house outside forms the *batterie de cuisine.*

A column-drill has been practised; a succession of long blasts on a whistle from the look-out post brings all hands scurrying from their multifarious jobs in the sawpits, carpenters' sheds, cook-houses, washing places, and whatnot outside, in through the main gate, which slams to as the last N.C.O. reports all in. The hundred to the loopholes and central reserve; the fifty to a roll-call in their four sections on the central square. All present? Off to your barracks. The men double to their cots, pack the few spare articles into the rucksacks, slip into the shoulder-bands, and fall in

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again, rifle in hand and equipment buckled on. The bayonet is carried fixed always in this land of close warfare, so the scabbarded kukri is the only waist impediment. Report all present again. No. 1 Section, to your rations, double march! and they clatter in through one entrance and out at the other, each man taking his neat packets of rations from the pigeon-hole bearing his name. Pack them in, outside, and load up. Back to the central square, left-about, clearing the gangway for No. 2 Section. Stand easy, and await orders.

J. meanwhile has taken up his own ready prepared burden. He depends for food and cooking on a contribution all round from the men. So his rucksack carries a weight equal to theirs in hospital dressings, medicines, a few simple surgery tools, and the invaluable syringe and pure carbolic crystals for instantly scouring out a poisoned arrow wound. Luckily, the local artist uses aconite only, which, carbolically treated and cauterised, gives a fair chance to the recipient. The tribes farther west use dead pig; no antidote for that.

But there must be no casualties. Walking cases are all very well, hampering but manageable; stretcher cases must not occur. So a certain responsibility attaches to the white man, his plans, his leadership, and the close backing by his little men.

One or two practice parades reduced the time, from first whistle to filing out through the gate, to thirty minutes; the machine was ripe for testing.

V.

The little column winds slowly through the thickest jungle, flankers, advanced and rear-guards in close touch; thanks to sappy undergrowth

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and thick leaf-mould underfoot, all but noiseless. Three days' trek away lies the large village in the foothills, the objective. Paths are avoided, the compass taking their place. Quiet, slow, and secure in invisibility ten yards off, the column worms its way along in confidence; *pace* the late expedition, the jungle is a friendly place, and anyhow as big an obstacle to foe as to friend. The compass, and the unexpectedness of the enterprise, do the rest.

At the end of the first day the column closes up to a compact bunch near a streamlet. A little dry wood from each rucksack starts the tiny fires. In an hour all are fed; quinine issued by J. and watched to destination, for the Gurk is an improvident little soul, and would neglect the precaution if he could. Close-up, compact, each section is responsible for its own front, the white man in the middle. Night falls, and the column would be as hard to discover in the tangle as a needle in a haystack.

By noon on the third day signs of the proximity of the village are apparent. Villages are all of one shape, a long oval. The plan, discussed till threadbare in the stockade, is put into action, three of the four sections circling the surrounding jungle to respective points of the compass, and awaiting the signal from the fourth. The dangers at this point are threefold: that an inhabitant may raise the alarm, which in two minutes would stampede the village into the surrounding jungle; that the men may lose direction in going through the village; that they may scatter in going through. Proper precautions and discipline will prevent all three, and find the column concentrated in the heart of the village, with the inhabitants unstampeded. Experience had already shown that as soon as a

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compact body of troops were well established in the middle of a village, ready and able to set it alight, the inhabitants generally accepted the *fait accompli*, and were ready to parley, even to be polite.

On this occasion all went well. Within three minutes from the signal whistle the force had converged on the 'moshup,' the long central hut reserved to the use of the young bachelors of the tribe. These, from their less sedentary habits, rendered their barrack slightly less verminous than the remainder. It was therefore the more acceptable as a place of temporary residence. The walls were sufficiently arrow-proof, and the position was one inexpugnable except by fire—not to be thought of by the owners of the thatched huts round about.

The gam, or headman, put in an appearance, a trifle white about the gills and treading like Agag. Er—what was it all about? War or peace? A sharp "du-toka!" and he squats, taking snuff and spilling half of it. "Now look here, my friend; we've come to pay you a friendly visit—friendly, you understand? But my men have come far, and need a little rest. So we will stay with you for a day or two. Yours is a pleasant village, and your people look fat and happy" (they looked like sick thunderclouds, as a matter of fact). "What a good gam you must be! And that's a fine pig under that hut; er—just send him along, will you? And, yes, a load or two of rice and some water in bamboos; my men are thirsty. Have a cigarette"—promptly taken, sniffed, rolled slowly into a ball between horny palms, and stuffed into the cheek, where it is chewed meditatively. "Off you go now." The welkin rings as the pig and two confrères are tied into cigar-shaped bundles with strips of cane, and lugged across to the doorway.

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Some diminutive fowls appear from nowhere, and add an obbligato to the soprano pigs; but the rice and water are a long time materialising. Two hours later it becomes a question whether to send a party to the dhan-huts and fetch it, risking subdivision. But at about what would be tea-time it comes along in baskets and hollowed bamboos, reluctantly but sufficient.

The situation is peculiar but reassuring, in that an occasional old woman is visible on the outskirts of the glowering groups in the middle distance. The groups squat and continue to glower, expectorate, and glower again. The female element thickens. They would have been cleared out into the jungle had there been any intention of definite mischief. The state of affairs is tacitly admitted by all to be lacking in precedent, a fact which seems to give the initiative over into the hands of the white man. Anyhow, the Gurkhas keep away from the doorway, giving no targets.

Somewhere about nightfall a couple of rotund brats potter into the open, suck thumbs, and stare round-eyed. By dark the ordinary domestic sounds of a village resume.

The disgruntled young bachelors, deprived of their shelter, dossed down anywhere. Mischief brewed in them to the end, but they lacked the impulse to action which usually comes to them after a day-long confab round the common cooking-fire. If the girls had once started guying them about it, a flare-up would have been inevitable. Luckily, nothing of the sort happened.

No precautions were relaxed in the 'moshup,' but the first night passed quietly. Next morning the gam reappeared, and suggested it was a fine day for a walk, and should he show them the easiest way back? Not so, my friend; and more

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porkers, rice, and water were ordered—much in excess of necessities; but it seemed politic to establish the idea of a long stay from the outset. This time the delay was longer, but patience won through.

Two more days passed in this Capua atmosphere of pig and plenty. By the fourth day the village was growing manifestly impatient. On one occasion the gam lost his temper, and nearly did something foolish. Jimmy's plan was working up to his best expectations: the Gurk was becoming an incubus, and the village was fool enough to show it.

By the fifth day a slight atmosphere of boredom began to creep over the garrison, and it seemed about time to up sticks and go. So at 2 A.M. or thereabouts the fifty-one intruders faded noiselessly into the night, slightly greasy about the chops, and fitting their clothes tightly. The village, improvident to the last, had posted no sentries, and knew nothing of the flitting till it found the 'moshup' empty in the morning, and the big bronze war-gong in the corner used as a kind of dish-cover to hide the surplus and uneatable portion of pig. It was far too late to try conclusions with the late occupants, who, five days later, reached the stockade by devious ways, these being distant from the route of outmarching.

That night James, tired and sore in the shoulders, turned into bed. "Wonder if they'll stir up trouble over this? Shouldn't be surprised." And, as he was dropping off to sleep, Tr-o-o-o-mm! Umma-oom-m-m-m! Woo-o-o-mmm! soft and mellow, and far away, the war-gongs throbbed and thuttered to one another across vast tracts of jungle.

He turned over and sat up.

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There it goes again.
Turn out again to-morrow.
Peace *and* privacy.
Oh lor . . .

VI.

It worked. No fighting, no transport, and the villagers thoroughly shaken out of themselves, and prevented from getting sedentary and mischief-hatching. The experiment was repeated on four other occasions, and the other stockades took it up and worked it in their districts. To the end it puzzled the junglis, who never found an efficient counterstroke other than a perpetual vigilance to which they were unequal. The end, to wit, that after some six months of it a group of gams appeared at headquarters and implored the Political to let them supply pigs and rice to the stockades, *in situ*, rather than that they should come to fetch it. This was refused, but the gams accepted the alternative, handed out as an ultimatum, that broad paths should be cut from village to village, and that Military Police patrols should go back and forth when and how they listed, in large or small parties, unopposed and undamaged. Also that the gams, one and all, should give themselves the trouble of a journey down to headquarters once a month.

Might they bring pigs and fowls as presents ?

NO—most damnably and immutably No ! Nobody wanted to see a pig again.

And the big man hr-r-r-r-mph'd them off the verandah.

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IV.

A BORDER AFFAIR.

THIS is an attempt at a record of events which have so far been buried in official files. The protagonists are mostly dead. Some six survive, in this pleasant land of regular meals and the policeman round the corner. So, lest susceptibilities be offended, a certain veil has been drawn across identities. Events, as well as people, have intentionally been either mixed up or made frankly composite. The dead, stout fellows, are the dead, and they will not mind; never was there less need of the tag *de mortuis*. The living will understand; and even though it make them restless, prone to throw down the printed page, stamp round the room, and drift out into the hall to finger the trophies, yet they also will forgive a tale, lopsided, discursive, having breaks and patches, for the sake of the merry days lived through and not forgotten.

I.

The frontiers of India are varied. Each obstacle has its own problems, but one postulate is common to all—that it should stay where it is, and not be monkeyed with by intruders on the other side of the fence. The portion of the frontier which forms

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the mainly unexplored hinterland of Assam is a belt of great depth and difficulty, a tangle of dense jungle tossed about on a welter of mountains and ridges which are flung together under no apparent geographical or geological plan. The denseness of the jungle is due to a warm rainfall, which is surpassed in few places of the globe for volume and continuity throughout the year. An important river finds a weak spot in the mountain barrier, and makes a crowded and freakish passage through the scrum from Central Asia to the ocean.

In this puzzling natural obstacle no immediate problem of invasion seemed possible at the time of which we write. As long as the belt had an Indiaward orientation, and the people beyond were either too lazy or too unmilitary to bother about it, all was well. But, following on a long period of Central Asian complication, the Power on the other side sent orders to its westernmost province to raise and equip an army for the effective occupation of a certain territory recently acquired by treaty. This occupation involved the movement of a force of some twenty thousand men for several months across the most inhospitable portion of Central Asia, where climate, transport, and local resources had hitherto limited movements to the compass of an occasional caravan. The problem at first appeared insurmountable, and pretty well paralysed the provincial Viceroy, who knew all about a province, but not the first thing about a platoon.

Luckily, the occasion produced the man—a small provincial Taotai, one Chao Erh-Fêng. Within a year this extraordinary man had raised, equipped, and thoroughly disciplined a good-sized army. With this he launched out across the wastes, heedless of cold; of obstacles in mountain,

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river, or desert; of almost negligible transport and supplies. With it he reached his destination, leaving a well-garrisoned line of communications behind him as he went. It was an epic achievement, of which we find traces in other great movements of Mongol armies of the past, each more astonishing than the one before. The details of Chao's exploit are on record in the Imperial archives of the Wai-Wu Pu, but they have never been given to the world. It may be possible to do so some day.

His expedition failed, through no fault of his own. The main striking force was smashed and scattered; the tattered but still efficient remnants, largely from the line of communications, were presently rolled up to the starting-point, where, nobody wanting them, they became an incubus. They were well armed, unpaid, and with a clear notion of what they wanted, and Chao himself was the only man in the province who could deal with them. He, like all other unsuccessful generals, was beheaded; but before he died he found time to save from starvation the troops whom he had raised, and who appear to have regarded him as a demi-god. Under the guise of a frontier force, he split them up into small stockaded detachments of from one to three hundred rifles apiece, on the arc of a wide circle from the Burmese frontier to the Himalayas. Here they were told to live on the country and to make the best of it.

They commenced on the side of the jungle no-man's-land remote from India, and, gradually absorbing local resources, which were always scanty, worked inwards. The absorption was incidental to the state of affairs, and was in no way planned, nor had it any ulterior object. Each ragged brave had his rifle and a good supply of

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ammunition; the bare presence of both was sufficient to secure an adequate livelihood among a primitive jungle population with a respect for firearms.

A considerable time later this unsuspected state of affairs came to light. A certain English officer, let us call him X., journeyed overland from the Yangtze in search of takin, till then inadequately described or shot at. His passport described him as a bug-hunter, under a Mongol euphemism which raised the status to one of the learned professions. The country traversed was, and still is, some of the most dangerous to be found in the unmapped world. A cheerfully aggressive population lives on terms of equality or scarcely veiled superiority with the local officials, who in their turn are hysterically hostile to any foreign traveller who may tie himself up in an unmanageable situation. X., however, bluffed and wheedled himself to a point where bluff would work no longer, and then took frankly to night-travel and lying perdu by daylight, till he got to the takin country, where the difficulties of human opposition fizzled out in a state of nature hostile to any form of life except the takin.

His light-hearted attitude to dangerous travel is best seen in what happened next, in that he plunged head-foremost into the tangled thicket which separated him from the nearest point in India.

Two marches in, he came on traces of Chao Erh-Fêng. A week later he found himself in the midst of a state of affairs which would have given even the youngest frontier officer food for anxious thought. He trod through it like Agag, and mostly by night, later leaving it behind him and making the better speed for it.

A long time later he reappeared, westward. He

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had finished a year's leave in this extraordinary way. His watch and his calendar had both of them long gone the way of the missing two-thirds of his kit, which may have accounted for his overstaying his leave by a considerable period. But the information he brought set the wires to headquarters buzzing. His journey was a feat, and yet it seems to have gone with a whimsical lilt from start to finish, as cheerily casual as the incomparable traveller who brought it off. His arrival can only be touched on here. Starved and exhausted, lame and swollen with septic leech-bites, he managed the last fifty miles, where the river grew navigable, in a log dug-out, his clothes in tatters and his last pair of boots long fallen to bits. Yet when his crew of two junglis managed to make him understand that the headquarters of the Bor Shap was near, he extracted from his one despatch-box a much-creased glad rag, which had done duty at the Yamens and Taotai courts over the other side —a blue serge suit, a shirt, and a collar. In these, and a pair of carpet slippers, he shuffled ashore and found his way to the Political's bungalow. Here, from 2 P.M. to 5, he waited patiently, not caring to send a message down to the Court-house. The Political arrived, and a light tea, which X., with quiet restraint, ate conventionally; so that it was not till an hour later that the big man realised that he had a case of starvation in front of him. Thereupon followed a mighty meal. But, to my mind, that initial restraint over the thin bread and butter and the bunlets commenced a bond between the two men that lasted for years after—a bond that had its bearing on much of the frontier work which followed.

By midnight the story was pieced together, rendered into telegraphese and cipher, and the

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Political, sitting over the Eurasian clerk in the tiny telegraph hut, dictated the groups and discouraged the sleepiness which would have relegated the job to to-morrow marnin, sah! The thing had its amusing aspect, not the least being the subsequent arrival from Olympus of a scarlet-crested letter, in tone as stiff as the cream-laid on which it was typed. It conveyed the severe official censure of the Ultimate Power in Council for the overstayal of leave; and went on to add, para. 2, the unsolicited fact that the sum of a large number of rupees had been awarded to the officer towards the expenses of the astonishing journey.

He took ten days' leave to Calcutta for a refit. There he got out from the remnants of his kit a bunch of notebook-leaves on which he had recorded a series of prismatic-compass bearings of the snow peaks visible from the valley as he travelled, and hitherto unknown. The bearings were accurate, but, in the nature of things, he had gone on from page to page as he marched, so that intersections, cross-bearings, and back-bearings were never on the same sheet. He had forgotten to number the pages, and the binding of the notebook had long since dissolved into fragments. He was seen, some time later, seated at a large table with the distracted Surveyor-General; the table was strewn with notebook leaves, and they were trying to piece together an important contribution to the world's geographical knowledge by the light of pure hope.

The whole thing was an epic; it will be related some day in its proper place.

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II.

Some time after X. had brought the state of affairs to light, Headquarters told the Local Government to see to it. The idea was the use of local resources to go and look into the matter. The corollary that the matter should be taken on, if found to be as stated, was implied rather than expressed. In the hands of the energetic frontier officers of the time, the taking on may well have been a foregone conclusion.

It was characteristic of the confidence reposed in the Political Officer by the Local Government that from the first they gave him practically a free hand in money and personnel wherewith to carry out the task, thereafter asking him to get ahead with it.

The job was big enough, in all conscience. Imprimis, there were these intruders to be found, seen to, and the *status quo ante* re-established. He knew enough about Chao to realise that his men would probably not take it lying down. Then there were the intervening tribes. Nobody knew anything about them, their numbers, their location, or their will to fight. If they were at all like their congeners near the border, anything from unpleasantness to a blaze-up of the whole frontier might be expected. But long experience of jungle tribes gave him hopes of a minutely subdivided collection of village democracies, mutually distrustful and without a common leader, using their gams as spokesmen, but depending for action on the results of dissecting by talk each problem as it occurred; they might flash out into a vindictive warfare wherein ambushes, poisoned arrows, and whirlwind dao charges would figure largely, or they

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might remain in a condition of unstable equilibrium. They were not to be trusted. On the whole, he banked on the weaknesses of self-determination (though, indeed, that 'pestilent polysyllable' had not at that time come to birth), and if he were able to show them that he neither feared them nor wanted to worry them, then the problem of oozing through their country with an ever-decreasing force at the head of an ever-lengthening line of communications might yet be solved.

Least of all could any assistance be looked for from them. They lived from hand to mouth on a little rice cultivation and much foraging in the jungle, so every scrap of food for the force would have to be carried, and the force would have to carry it. How much food? How many carriers? There he could not even begin to guess. This much he knew of the country, unexplored though it was: it was a simply damnable tangle, wherein jungle, incessant climbing, rain, rivers, and heat combined to make anything but static life nearly impossible. The expedition had not even the advantage of being on X.'s route, since considerations irrelevant to our subject sent it northwards instead of eastwards.

Now the first principle of jungle warfare is 'little and often.' Tactics, movements, camps, stockades, cannot be worked by horde, as in open warfare. A force with a frontage of one man will, if large, have an interminable length, and will invite trouble all along its vulnerable body. Much subdivision needs many leaders; and though he knew and trusted the Gurkha company commanders, yet many white men would be wanted in a land where every normal condition seemed to be standing on its head and waving its legs. So the first use he made of his *carte blanche* was to

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indent for officers. His requirements centred in the versatile. Physical fitness, confidence, and enthusiasm were almost as necessary, since work—unremitting, and exhausting to mind and body—would be the order of the day. His wide acquaintance of men gave him more to pick and choose from than he had room for, but twenty names were sent in and their owners were bidden to the feast. Hardly two came from the same cantonment, but they had one thing in common as they pushed north at their best speed: each travelled light, and each man's body-servant had a complete kit.

One limitation only was imposed on the Political—no more than one battalion of Military Police might be used. It was necessary to keep the thing as Civil as possible, therefore the fewer soldiers the better.

But the battalion was worth many. Minutely subdivisible into responsible parts, the squad was the unit, and all larger formations multiples thereof. The N.C.O.'s were in daily habit of acting on their own with their squads. The company commanders (it was in the days before platoons) might be relied on in distant and prolonged responsibility. The white officers were final arbiters; but, being scanty, were more administrators than tactical leaders. All native ranks were Gurkha, born to the jungle and the queer ways thereof, and so closely akin to unadorned and uncomplicated Nature that they needed little training. The first lesson of all, the essential friendliness of the jungle itself, was a thing which one might preach in vain to the open plainsman or town-dweller; to the Gurkha it was such a matter of course that he would have gaped at any one bothering to assert it. This confidence, wedded to a merry combativeness and a complete trust in his

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fellows and in his superiors, made up the ideal jungle soldier.

All this needs stating, once, to show how a great deal of what subsequently happened would have been impossible with any but Gurkhas.

The details of how the supplies were obtained, and with them the semi-Tibetan coolie-transport to lift them, are irrelevant. Both had to come from a long way off; in the end, both infinitely exceeded the initial estimate. When the column eventually got back, it found the base camp four times as large as when it started.

. . . . . .

We next find a semi-cleared level space in the jungle, at the highest point on the river to which a stern-wheel steamer could penetrate—the bottom of the first rapids. Here forgathered, first, the battalion of Military Police with its four white officers. As their cooking fires twinkled on the first evening, the Political stepped ashore.

Charles Douglas Pardon-Howe, Political Officer of the Jungle Tracts, plenipotentiary in the Areas North of the River, friend of the worker and terror of the slacker, confirmed bachelor and occasional teetotaller, was born at Ballater, in the kingdom of Scotland, forty-two years previous to the time with which we deal. He stood six feet four in his rubber-soled shoes, had a chest as big as a bass drum, and the voice of the bull of Bashan. The immense dome of his bald head held a brain which no problem could stump and nothing could flurry; withal, he was a man of his hands, and great freckled hairy paws they were as they hung loosely to his sides. On occasion he could fly into a fury; and then the great air-passages, as round and big as the Marble Arch, would reverberate through the jungle like rolling drums. Only once

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can I remember seeing him struck dumb and stupid: a bit of petty meanness came to light in the dealings of a tribe with its neighbour, what time he held durbar between them; if recollection serves, he let the whole thing slide, and went off to the mess for a drink.

The gams, or headmen of tribes, would pad down to his bungalow at headquarters. Here, in the deep verandah, he would hold informal court, plaintiffs and defendants squatting on the bare boards. In five minutes he would get to the root of it all, and in nine cases out of ten an inter-tribal head-hunting would cease to impend. Once a gam said something impertinent. The Political Officer leant across the table and "Hr-r-r-r-ONGG!" said he, or noise to that effect; and, before the glassware in the dining-room had ceased vibrating the gam had shot off the verandah, across the lawn, and into the jungle. These eyes saw it.

Tireless of body, single and simple of purpose, withal kindly and courteous, a very parfyte gentyl knight was he. He stalked through the land with a lilt and a swing of which each and all of us, white man or Gurkha, caught the direct infection. Under a lesser man the mad adventure would have fizzled out, or, more probably, would never have started.

As he emerged from his hut next morning, his new officers commenced to arrive. Each, as he came ashore from steamer or dug-out, was met by a havildar and fatigue-party, and a note showing his shanty and the direction of the mess hut; also the fact that a meal was available. Each, neglecting the meal and leaving kit and servant to the fatigue-party, repaired forthwith to the Political; who, figuratively, took him by the hand and offered him beer. Most were welcomed by

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their short names. Each emerged from the hut with orders to go and get fed, and thereafter repair to the particular job assigned. Not one but was on working terms with his job by bed-time. Shorts and shirt-sleeves clothed each, the toilsome day sparsely punctuated with precarious meals, or meals indeed clean forgotten. This would end with a bath, the garb of the day flung down in a sticky heap in the corner of the shanty, dinner in clean clothes, and a general uprising from camp-chairs as the Political beamed in the doorway and took the head of the table. Appetisers stood on a side-table; vermouth of two colours, and gin (the three were generally known as roast wolf, fried fox, and boiled owl), but nobody bothered about them much. They were abstemious folk, and an unexpressed feeling existed that the frontier was a long way from short drinks.

Followed strenuous days. The heat was terrific; the rain, incessant for ten months of the year, was a warm downpour. If you stood in the doorway of your hut and put your hand out, it felt like a shower of blood. In five minutes it soaked you; but since it never chilled you, soaked you remained till bath-time. Any attempt at a mackintosh was futile; you got just as wet with perspiration inside it as you would with rain, and it hampered you. Luckily the base camp stood on an old sandbank. Had it been soil, the whole fit-out would presently have sunk into the mud and been no more seen.

The cheery efficiency of the camp was infectious. It was also a little strange, by standards of purely military expeditions. More work was got through, but in a looser way. It is hard to define the difference. Possibly something of the same sort differentiates an English industry run by private

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enterprise from the same industry nationalised or run by a Government department. The visible outturn and economy of effort bore the same difference in both cases. But it was obvious that the work, loose though it was, would not have gone so well had it not been for the Political's power to choose his instruments.

In a little more than a fortnight from the landing of the first of the expedition, the first forerunners were off. It took half an hour for the little column to leave its ground and be swallowed up in the jungle path. The expedition had begun.

III.

In a few days another great camp of huts sprang up as an advanced base close below the hills and the first climb. With the first bound forward still in process of consolidation, the advance party pushed ahead. Let us go with them.

Now, as we have already seen, the essence of jungle tactics is 'little and often.' This limits a column, as a rule, to fifty rifles and a hundred and fifty carriers, which gives it a week's radius of action—or a bit longer if the daily rations are cut down. The difficulty throughout the operations was so to plan that the transport stayed back while the loads moved forward: a contradiction in terms, but one not altogether impossible. If fifty rifles and a hundred and fifty carriers could go forward to a spot where they could all live for a week, and if the hundred and fifty could go *back* again one march, then the fifty rifles could live for four weeks, though immobile. Why these gymnastics? The answer gives the key to all the long delays and many anxieties which filled the

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subsequent twelvemonth. The column, as a whole, could not push straight ahead with the food it carried, since a time would come when the very vastness of the carrying power would eat up its loads and defeat its own objects, leaving the column *planté là* and foodless. The solution lay in a succession of bounds forward, each bound halting and piling up an accumulation of rations for the next forward move. As the line grew longer, so the halts also, since the increasing length of the line ate most of the stuff before it could reach the head of the line.

The little column, very compact and well closed up, moved off silently before dawn, and, as the inky blackness of the narrow tunnel-like path turned to its daily grey twilight, found themselves climbing abruptly. And here they got a foretaste of what was afterwards to be the normal angle of the human body. Despite all necessity for instant readiness of action, rifles had to be slung where hands were as valuable as feet and as necessary. Up and up, the thin track twisting and turning; not, indeed, to avoid the angle, but as the line of least resistance over a surface tangled with twisted roots, encumbered with the boles of fallen trees, slippery with rain and the mush of decaying vegetation generations old. The thin insistent warm rain pattering and dripping off a dozen intervening obstacles before it hit you; the glutinous heat; the gloom and the all-pervading reek like a garbage pail; the stink of clothed man in a land where all, by rights, should go naked, unescapable in the tightly packed column—all these went to the making of an atmosphere in which men lived and slept, toiled and fought against every conceivable obstacle, natural

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and unnatural, for the ensuing twelve months. An amphibian existence, overlaid with a smell. Let us state it at once and get done with it. Let it be packed into the back-consciousness as a setting for all that happened, week by week and month by month. The land and its jungle never were flat, not for a dozen yards, in all the twelve-month of strain. One foot in front of another was always a step up or a step down. A stockade was to become a perpetual slope, varied by little terraced paths; a camp in a river bottom was out of the question in a land where water rose or fell a dozen feet in an hour at the bidding of the latest rainstorm; the very ridge joining two impossible slopes was so narrow that one might well bestride it saddle fashion (these legs have ridden it), and at the same time sit softly on the precarious mush not six inches broad. To the end the greatest ambition of at least the white men would have been to walk two abreast over firm and level ground with God's sunlight beating on them out of a clear sky.

The first march climbed and scrambled through what seemed interminable hours. There were bellows to mend in the coolie line in the first half-hour, and halts were frequent. Tactics, except the normal advanced and rear guards and flankers, were impossible. Up and up; halt and start again and halt once more. Keep compact. The coolies must learn that their own safety depends on no straggling. Nothing by which to measure distance or progress.

At long last the grey twilight thinned in front. Abruptly the advanced guard dived over a knife-edge and came to a halt. What's up? Message passed back, "The hill's finished."

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"What?" "The *khud* has finished. What orders?"

A sparse prospect through the tree-tops showed a distant opposite side to an apparently bottomless valley. A halt was called, and a hurried meal eaten. The aneroid showed a rise of 6000 feet since starting.

Off again. The column plunged down the hill with its tail well up. The progress never degenerated into a run. Throughout, it was a scramble, often face to khud, and a ladder-like descent down roots and hanging on to creepers. It became nearly as toilsome as the ascent by the time an insistent whispering had grown into a roar of waters, and the column emerged in a shapeless mob on to the edge of a torrent.

The first day's march was done.

Down with loads. Off with kits. Get those coolies collected and out of the way. They will have half an hour's rest, and then they'll have to go back. Groans. What, *back* again? Yes, you'll go without loads. The Burra Sahib's orders. He wants you back there to-night.

So this is the place? A discoloured torrent plunging over piled rocks. A clear-cut edge to the jungle marking high water. *And* a stink. We cannot camp down here. Out with your kukris. Get that jungle cut back. Up and around a spur the line formed, and, at whistle signal, moved forward—hacking merrily. The sappy tangle fell in swathes, and lay where it fell; the line progressed yard by yard, letting in daylight and clearing the ground. Forward, upward, and around, flick, clatter, and crash, the curved kukris swing and the jungle falls apart all ways. Merrily now. A havildar strikes up a monotonous chant—

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solo: "*Has*tebira,"
tutti: "*Huinn*ssa!"
s. "*Bhal* gar, bhaiyan,"
t. "*huinn*ssa!"
s. "*Jor* garo, *bir*aho,"
t. "*huinn*ssa!"

and so on interminably, each *huinn*ssa marking a swashing wipe with the kukri. They're at it now. Leave 'em to it. Five men escort from the rear-guard; get these coolies together; back to camp as fast as you can leg it, but *keep closed up*. The naik salutes briskly and doubles off. Three years' service and an independent responsibility of a hundred and fifty souls at a moment's notice in a land like this? A merry heart goes all the way, a sad tires in a mile-a. He bosses them together, sends one rifleman ahead as advanced guard, keeps another with him, and sets the rest to herd the tail. In two minutes they have vanished. Any anxieties about them? None whatever.

Slowly the spur clears. In an hour there is not only room to camp but sufficient space to give a clear view from the perimeter. Huts, framed on saplings of cut débris and hastily roofed with banana fronds, spring up everywhere. Neither at this or at any subsequent time was there even one tent. The expedition never owned one. Whether temporary or permanent, the shelter was a hut, and skilful were all in their making. Standing camps had pretentious structures; temporary perimeters flung them together anyhow, so long as they kept the persistent rain out of bedding laboriously kept dry in waterproof covers during the day.

A whoop and a shove and a heave all together, and the cleared mush became a waist-high abattis

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all round the perimeter. Long before dark, what had been a jungle-packed spur had become an orderly cleared rectangle, defensible and snug. Kits were packed into huts; rations were piled neatly under cover, and raised off the sodden ground on a cribwork of logs. Cooking fires glimmered at nightfall, and presently there was no stir but the sentries.

Later it became a permanent stockade. For the moment, all were too utterly fagged to bother about anything but dinner and bed.

Quick and sure these camps were made day by day. In their making, and the stockades which replaced them, the Gurkha shone as the handy man, *par excellence*, of the jungle.

Next morning there were surroundings to be investigated. The path ran down to a series of massive logs thrown from boulder to boulder across the torrent, and climbed to the opposite jungle. But why this stink? The drowsy rotten-vegetable smell normal to the tangle seemed to have got mixed with decaying eggs. Down to the water, whence the reek arose. On investigating the rocks we found sulphur thickly encrusted on them. The water, too, smelt abominably. We will have to shift. No; nowhere to shift to. We will have to stick it.

The camp was afterwards called Harrogate; the name stuck, and appeared in the reports.

A little technical planning of the stockade site; a subdivision of tasks among squads, and the two British officers were ready for the business of the day. Five men were told off as escort, and the subadar took charge of the stockading. It was necessary to explore ahead and see what, if anything, lay beyond the next ridge. By evening they were back, tired out, and nothing found

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but just such another ridge, a bit higher and steeper if anything, and an equally abrupt descent to a torrent the counterpart of Harrogate, bar a different but unidentifiable smell. No villages; no junglis. So far so good. The ten-foot logs of the stockade had taken shape, and with it the beginnings of a permanent line-of-communication post. Another convoy of rations had come through, and with it two more officers.

Macmillan; a small, sinewy, red-haired fox of a fellow with a quiet manner and a knack of taking complete charge of any situation, however unexpected or involved. His lack of inches, and apparent insignificance, covered nine stone of pure gold. Loyal, silent, and thorough, a thing was as good as done once you had given him the order. He was subaltern to Crooke.

Now Crooke was a puzzle to us all. Normally, he had the dreariest manner imaginable, with a slow rather high-pitched speech, delivered through a thin beak which arched outwards from his sandy eyebrows. He had a long, thin body and great bony hands and feet. When nothing much was happening, he appeared to be the gloomiest of all pessimists; the slightest thing would set him off, and then out would roll long thin strings of the most appalling despondency, rising and falling like violin storm-music in the Fliegende Holländer. On first acquaintance, anybody would have put him down as the most impossible chap in a show which literally depended for its success on cheery confidence. But, to be just to him, Crooke never impinged on this; it was the small things which set him off, the little trivialities which slipped unnoticed off the backs of the others. After a bit, it was obvious that this was not the real man. To anyone who was, even once, privileged to see

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him in a difficult situation, above all in a fight, he changed out of recognition. The worse the task, the cheerier he grew. Normally a voracious eater in spite of his leanness, he could carry on for days on next to nothing when occasion needed. And, in a fight, he went gay and berserk, and flung things about with a complete disregard for his own skin. He came straight through the war untouched, though he was the only survivor of his company which sailed heavenwards on a Boche mine in January '15, near Festubert. By common consent, originating no one knew whence, he was known as "The Doomworm," and universally loved.

These two, after counsel taken, reported progress to the Burra Sahib, and suggested a farther advance. Sanction came with an extra fifty rifles and a week's rations; the party duly dumped into Camp No. 2. Before the week was out, a third exploration forwards found the path blocked by a succession of parallel rock outcrops twelve feet high peering through the jungle like plinths of an Inca temple, and only passable by the jungli method. This consisted in felling a tree against the rock face and cutting shallow notches in it, wherein the horny toes of the great splayed feet found secure foothold. It would not do for men in boots. So bamboo ladders had to be made, replaced later by more solid log-cut steps. This took time, and the daily convoys had already filled the first two stockades before Camp 3 was made and the back pressure was relieved. The fourth march went comparatively easily, a succession of trifling ups and downs of not more than a couple of thousand feet each.

It is easy, after a lapse of years, to think lightly of the toil. But recollection brings an evening

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when, after a particularly poisonous day, Beach, the R.E. Survey Officer, took the trouble to add up the aneroid readings of the ups and downs to date. Questioned, he gave what he was at. In the first ten marches only, it appeared that an officer, jungle thin, in marching order, exerted just on two thousand foot tons of energy in getting over the ground. Blank incredulity. "All right; add up those figures and see." "What of it?" "Well, this much of it; it's the same as if you hoisted, say, a two-ton iron weight to the top of the Eiffel Tower and held it there. Also, me lad, if you let that same two-ton weight fall freely it would, on arrival at the bottom, go slap through a modern battleship from conning-tower to keelson, and sink it with all hands and the cook. Call that nothing as a one-man job?"

Nor was the climbing done in passable comfort of person. The inside of the hat was usually the only dry spot on the man; herein reposed, as often as not, a rubber pouchful of baccy, and another holding a box of matches. The sodden clothes, soaked by rain from out inwardly, and by sweat from in outwards, held together shabbily. When they smelt too badly the servant would wash them (and what quantities of bar-soap were used from first to last), and then kipper them to some semblance of dryness over a smoky wood fire. The smell thereby was at least a change.

. . . . . .

The end of the fifth march found the first serious check. By evening the advanced party had reached the precipitous upper bank of a large river flowing in from distant snows, and a worthy cousin of Big 'Un the Great, whom it joined two miles farther on. No torrent this, to be bridged with logs. Dawn next morning brought the

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problem in full sight. Three hundred yards from bank to precipitous bank; and, below, a swirling mass of yeasty water all breakers and whirlpools. Over this hung, in one sweeping festoon, the local idea of a bridge. It was made of two thin built-up ropes of cane. From these depended at intervals loops of split bamboo. Insecurely fastened to each loop was a third cane, the footway; *et voilà tout.* The thing had about the solidity of a wireless aerial. Below it, a clear two hundred feet, foamed the river. And, as they watched it, a thin little breeze got up. The crazy joke sagged gently outward in the wind, and as gently sagged back again.

By Jove! look at that.

Well, you know, nobody minded scrambling up and down dripping khuds, breaking his neck on ladders, and generally behaving like a monkey on a stick; but this sort of thing *was* the limit. What's to happen now? They couldn't cross *that* particularly idiotic jest. . . . Let's think.

Thought brought no solution to the problem of how a man in boots could climb down and up a slippery slope consisting of a single cane, even if you cut out the river below. Blondin had been dead some years.

In the end they sent back an unvarnished account of it to the Burra Sahib, and gave it as their opinion that a thing like that had no place on an ordered line of communications. They awaited a reply, at his convenience.

One supposed, of course, that it could be crossed, as it had obviously taken some trouble to build. Later on they grew accustomed to the sight of local junglis, one at a time, launching forth on the spiderway. Great splay feet which had never known a boot; toes all separated and each en-

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dowed with independent movement; big toe, thumb-like, in apposition to the rest, and prehensile, *more majorum*.

The reply came two days later, with Pardon-Howe in person. With him came various coils of thin wire cable, and a full appreciation of a situation apparently incapable of solution. First, he sent the two interpreters across, who, being in a way born to it, went barefoot and easily with a quick tripping step, which swung them to the other side in no time. They made light of the length of thin line which they unrolled as they proceeded. Arrived on the other bank, they hauled on the line made fast to the wire cable. First one line and then the other, till the two cable ends reached them. These they wrapped round, and knotted to, two big trees at their end. Now, says the Burra Sahib, haul on our ends. Right: that's enough. Make fast. And it was so. And there before us hung two cables of satisfactory solidity, three feet apart and well inside the structure of the bridge. Now cut down some of those bamboos and split them. Cut them in three-feet lengths, and notch them near the ends. Now you'll see; and he laid on the first two or three and wired them down to the cables. Now you can carry on.

After the first half-dozen, one got to forget the dizzy drop and the infernal flexibility beneath as one knelt. By evening there was a perfectly good bridge with a footway three feet wide, dependent on no haphazard vegetable matter but on good honest English cable, and the handrails of the old bridge to steady by. We crossed and recrossed it with confidence.

Pardon-Howe stood and looked at it, his great hairy arms hanging loose.

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Would it stay put ?

It would stay put.

And that was that.

A dozen times afterwards the thing was repeated with other rivers, till it became a drill. No one bridge ever needed mending or altering, and all were left behind, as good as when first made, when the column returned a year later.

Asked why he used such thin cable, he explained that the law of diminishing returns begins to operate when strength becomes weight. You could not indefinitely increase the tensile strength of wire cable by thickening it. There comes a time when the weight of the thickened cable itself would defeat its own strength if sufficiently long.

. . . . . .

Camp was shifted to the farther bank, and a picket placed at both ends of the bridge.

And now things commenced to move up apace. A large stockade, to be headquarters to this portion of the line; an ambitious ration godown on generous lines; large accommodation for the coolie corps; and all hands set to pushing back the jungle. In a few days the centre of gravity of the expedition lay in the new post, and all to the south of it had thinned out into permanent lines of communication strength.

Pardon-Howe scrambled down the bank, threw a line into the tumbled water, and in five minutes was fast in what appeared to be an outsize mahseer.

All ranks fit and happy. The jungle is a friendly place.

IV.

Here or hereabouts the nude and primitive obtrudes; the primitive all bowed and arrowed, suspicious and inclined to be warlike.

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It was important that he should not be warlike. Not that anyone was afraid of him, but the truly damnable country held problems enough of its own without wanting any uncertain human nature added to it.

At the outset a considerable asset to our side lay in the presence in camp of one Toyo, Gam of 'Srosheng in the Lower Territories closely adjoining base headquarters. This fine old specimen was extensively married in his own village, and related thereby to several of the tribes of the Upper River. On a recent occasion he had left home. He may or may not have gone down to see the Burra Sahib. Anyhow, while he was away, an outstanding Don Juan among the local youths had seen fit to make matters complicated in the gam's household.

Toyo, coming back unexpectedly, caught his enemy all abroad, and hewed windows in him. This being judged rather undemocratic by the local chinwag merchants, he bethought him of the Burra Sahib who used to make much of him, in a quiet way, whenever he called, and decided to put in a few months with him on the expedition. Hence the presence in camp of Gam Toyo, unclothed in person but wearing on his head a rolled-up Balaclava cap acquired from a rifleman, as a sign of adherence to civilisation. He had a few words of Hindustani and a wealth of expressive gesture, and appointed himself *ex-officio* intermediary between expedition headquarters and the rest of jungledom. He was about the only jungli we met who had any gentlemanly instincts, and would sooner have died than cadge a drink or a cigarette, though he never refused either, day or night. It was as amusing as giving buns to a bear: very solemn and apparently insatiable. He and

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a great half-witted oaf who carried his roll of bedding (also acquired as a sign of civilisation) were the only two junglis ever allowed into camp or stockade; to the remainder it was always kept a *terra incognita.*

Shortly after the bridge-building, Toyo went off on his own, and, coming back in the evening, announced the presence of a large village up the khud ahead, and that he had 'warned' a committee of the leading citizens to appear at the stockade next morning. "The deuce you did," said Pardon-Howe; "and who gave you leave and liking to order these strangers about? And what do you want me to do with them?" Oh, well; it would be a good thing if the Bor Shap saw them, and they saw the strength of the show the Sirkar was putting up; and anyhow, it would be as well to hand them out some of those clasp-knives and things—and Toyo glanced reminiscently towards the box of 'political presents' in Pardon-Howe's hut. He had a nerve, had Toyo. Probably his quiet self-confidence was one of the reasons why we all liked him so much; that and his primitively aristocratic insistence on keeping company with sahibs only, even if rather monosyllabic and gesticular; you never saw him in the men's lines.

Next morning down the path came the deputation at a jog-trot; fifteen of them (they always seemed to work in mobs) and a tailed-on following of small boys and smaller dogs come to look on. Tall upstanding men with, as you might expect from the country, big thighs and massive calves; their feet we have noted already. Each man was clothed in a helmet built of interlacing bands of thick cane, proof against dao-cuts; each carried a heavy dao slung slantwise across the chest in

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an open wooden scabbard; each had a haversack of grey monkey-skin filled with a frowsy collection of odds and ends of coarse tobacco, millet cakes, metal tobacco-pipe, flint, tinder, and what not. Had it been war, each would have carried a five-foot bow and a quiver of poisoned arrows. This was the absolute sum-total of their garb. All were unspeakably dirty.

Toyo went out to meet them. They crowded round him, all talking at once; mannerless. Presently, assembled in some sort of order and squatting in a shapeless group, they awaited the Bor Shap, whose advent nobody acknowledged by more than an oafish curiosity and a bit more expectoration than before. He took his seat on a camp-chair; the nearest jungli reached out a filthy paw and fingered the slack of his breeches, a texture unknown to him. The group shuffled forward without rising; a dog got his paw trodden on, yelped, bit, and was cuffed out of the circle.

Toyo spoke up. "This, see, is the Bor Shap; a good man, but heavy of hand and the master of many guns. Even white men obey him."

Pause.

Expectoration, in rear, and another contre-temps with a dog.

"He's a good man, this Bor Shap, and has come a long way to greet you and give you sharp knives which close like a trap; and fire-makers; also gewgaws for your wives. But he is in rather a hurry, having business over there"—pointing north—"with the Kitai. He tells me he has no wish to interfere with you. He will come to your village to-morrow and give you presents; meanwhile, you've seen him, and you can go."

Not a stir. Lumpish grunts.

Small boy in the forefront of the group, his

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arm round a piebald cur, speaks up. "What business is it of yours, gam?" Chorus of assent. "How do we know you haven't come to make war?" "See," says Toyo, "he sits unarmed among you all. Even his gun-soldiers are some way off. He wears no dao, nor is he afraid of you. Does he *look* like an enemy?" He looked singularly placid, as a matter of fact, though, as he told us afterwards, the reek of the gathering was enough to turn his breakfast. Simple arguments; for a simple, childish, potentially venomous gathering mentally little above the apes. "Show us the knives, gam." "To-morrow, he brings them."

And they drifted off in ones and twos, curious about the unusual stir on the river bank, ignored by the Gurkhas who had piled arms inside the perimeter and were yo-heave-ho'ing at the job of tightening the cables. The whole concourse was meaningless to the junglis; nor, to the unversed in the ways of armies, did the unarmed haphazard gathering of riflemen, coolies, and white men, all unaccountably busy, look at all like an invasion.

"Well, there you are, you see," said Pardon-Howe in the mess later. "They're children; they've absolutely no organisation. As far as I can see they haven't even a gam, and settle their affairs by unending talk. Why, if you'd seen that little imp doing spokesman for them! All the same, they'll panic if we give them half a chance. And I want to get on; no time for wars"—and he gave out orders about deportment, avoiding any contact, and if the village must be gone through by any parties, we were to go straight through and not to bother about anything we met.

Next morning he climbed to the village with Toyo and a couple of laden coolies. For an hour he sat among the reeking mass of humans

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who crowded round and fingered bits of him. He dealt out knives, and flints, highly coloured enamelled cups, and burning-glasses; and handed a bulging parcel of Brummagem stuff to what looked like the female oldest inhabitant, who promptly skipped to her hut, mobbed by a jackdaw concourse of soiled Aphrodites. At long last he yawned and strolled away down the path. As he entered the jungle, so Toyo told us, a small urchin narrowly missed him with a clod of clay; he did not even turn his head.

He arrived back very late for lunch, and ravenous. Some of us sat with him in the Mess while, in silence, he made an enormous meal. At the end, he put down a long tumbler of Pilsener at one go; and, "thank Allah, who made men hollow!" sighed he. He pushed away his plate, and told us all about it.

Lord, but we were glad to have him back.

It was a mad thing to do, but it had its effect. That village held five hundred fighting men, but never afterwards were we troubled with anything worse than a meddlesome curiosity and endless cadging. Also, before we were ready for the next stage, the word had gone ahead that there was nothing to bother about, and the various monkey parliaments never succeeded in talking themselves into any definite action.

He had taken the measure of their foot all right. Democracy. . . .

V.

From this time onwards we count the beginning of the big strain. It was pull devil, pull baker, and put your backs into it, all. Step by step and march by march, the advanced party pushed

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ahead and the main body followed. The coolie corps strung out in their daily toil; the rations moved up; not a soul was allowed up to the head of the line unless absolutely wanted, since every ounce off the rations toilsomely accumulating meant more delay for all. There was, indeed, no absolute necessity for hurry, in that there was no time-limit in a show the very geographical limits of which only became known from day to day. Government had given Pardon-Howe a free hand, and in return he loyally made the thing as cheap and as quick for them as was possible. Nobody knew better than he how the expense was mounting up; for instance, in the end, it was calculated that a load of rice which cost four rupees at the base was worth fifty-five by the time it reached the top; and the ever-increasing army of carriers simply ate money.

But the country was the very devil. Ridge after ridge stood right up on end, and had to be taken at the steepest angle each time; the infernal simian path compelled it. A two thousand foot rise to each ridge, and the corresponding scramble down on the far side, became normal. It was just a case of slogging through by the narrow, sliding, slippy acclivity, up hill and down dale, and trusting to the endurance of white man, Gurkha, and pahari carrier. To the end, none of the three failed us. They wore thin, they wore out; the output of horse-power slowed and diminished; but they never broke down.

Village by village they made good. Each camp and ensuing stockade was kept well away from the villages, which, indeed, were always perched on the higher spots. Each village solemnly assembled in the long hut used by the young warriors, and talked out the advent of the advanced party;

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and as solemnly arose from conference in the grey of the morning with nothing settled and tacit permission to all and sundry to do as pleased each best; as, indeed, he always did.

Fifteen marches done. The next bound forward took us through a village called Tuting; to our lasting regret it was not composed of two separate halves, so that there might be an Upper and a Lower. Down the other side, and we met yet another river.

Very occasionally the clouds lifted, to show us the lower snowy slopes, way and away up to our left, with unimagined heights above; but nothing to relieve or break the tangle ahead.

One evening two appeared in coats. We looked at each other. It was growing cooler! I do not remember that anyone voiced the suspicion, the hope. But in one mind at least the idea glimmered, almost too good to suggest. In level we were not *much* above the base camp, and the month was August; but could we be getting nearer snow? And was the snow ahead of us?

On and on we went, the line lengthening, and, perforce, thinning. Now we were reduced to a mere hundred rifles at the head, the survey party, and the coolies who put the loads in from the last stage. All else were strung out along the lines of communication. Stockades, escorts, fever, construction casualties, thin them how we would, still the line strung out and still the man-power dwindled, till individuals were doing the work of squads, and squads, as such, were only to be found in the larger posts. You would have thought that anyone with a thick stick could have broken the line and starved the head of it; and nobody so much as raised a finger to it. But no one seemed anxious; least of all the Political, to whom, week

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by week, we took the figures. Could we go on with this steam-bath amphibian existence indefinitely? Stout hearts, tough bodies, the Gurkha never weakened; but could we only have got more of him!

A week later; and though the grey, weeping cloud-blanket lay as close as ever, and as stiflingly hot by day, that evening saw everyone in coats. It's getting colder. Whisper it. Are we getting near snow? If so, it's snow ahead; we've had the main range on our left for a long while, and that hasn't altered. If only we could see through the fog. . . .

. . . . . .

By evening we had found another village, and there was the usual questioning through Toyo. This time we tried to discover more of what lay ahead. Who were the people? Oh, just people; different customs to ours. What sort of customs? Just customs . . . people. . . . Any mountains? Oh, yes (the word for mountain and jungle-scramble was all one, so no information here). Any snow? A nasal snigger and a pointing uphill to the usual lumps of limestone and ice far above us. Maddening people; they were not really secretive; they just had the brains of hens, and about as much intelligent interest in their surroundings.

Next day facts and figures were examined. We could not go on for ever, stringing out a line like this. Something would snap. The escort at the head of the line had thinned to four squads, less than fifty men, and no kits amounted to more than a change of underclothes and a blanket; all else was sacrificed to rations.

A flying column then. We would have to chance it; with thirty rifles and a lump of reserve rations. Chance the distance, chance opposition on the

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way, chance the ultimate bump, the nature of which none of us could foresee, when we ran into that for which we were searching. The fittest of the men, the most nearly Tibetan of the carriers, the half-dozen sahibs, and the rest would be luck.

Next day came the first glimmerings of a change. As we topped a ridge in the evening, there below us lay a collection of huts of unusual outline; and, stuck alongside them, long, thin, mast-like poles with something fluttering all down the length.

"A-ha!" said the Burra Sahib; "Tibetans!"

We tumbled pell-mell down the khudside and into the village. No flimsy structures these, of split bamboo; planks, roughed out by hand from logs; solid corner posts and roofs of stone slabs; a praying-wheel in front of the first hut, and what looked marvellously like a lama coming out to meet us.

In a moment our carriers had downed loads; hands up sleeves, tongues out, and heads bobbing. Next minute we were in the thick of it with a thin little crowd of mannerly villagers. What a change from the grimy aboriginals lower down. Here were duffle-clad flat-faced folk, bowing and beaming from open doorways, square sturdy men, and sonsy maidens. Would we be pleased to come inside? We would, bless 'em.

They gave us brick tea out of a copper tea-urn by an open hearth: a clean, rough, weather-proof comfort which reminded us of the interior of a crofter's cottage at home. Polite noises. . . .

Gently does it.

Touching, now, this small matter of Cathayans. . . .

Volubility. But in the end we got nothing certain: no definite distance, no numbers.

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We slept, snugged down in the friendly bothy. We foresaw fleas; there were none. Next morning we were off again, bowed out by the lama, who had donned a dingy suit of full pontificals for the occasion. By evening there was just such another village, with more hospitality, but, if possible, less information.

Two days afterwards at mid-day we topped a ridge with an unusually clear view, and—

"*Kitai!*" said Toyo, pointing.

Where? We pulled out our field-glasses.

There, far, far away on a bare slope, hung three sordid-looking little huts. A tattered banner drooped from a staff. Two figures in blue hung over a fire. Nothing more.

By evening we were up to them, and, in the failing light, took charge. There was a sergeant, and there were eight men. They were silent and suspicious, ragged in the remnants of a blue uniform, but each had a well-kept Belgian mauser and a full bandolier.

We settled down in their clearing, but aloof and with no chances taken. Next morning, Pardon-Howe interviewed them. They had monosyllabic fragments of Tibetan in common, and, where these failed, the linguist of the party stepped in. He had a full knowledge of Yunnanese, but these men were Lolos from Szechuan, and understood not a word. But, and we found it wonderful, the sergeant had a working knowledge of ideograms. In twisty strokes and characters the conversation proceeded: the linguist drew them in pencil, the sergeant sketched a reply. He was an intelligent man. In ten minutes we knew that his was the advanced party of a main camp high up there. Where? Up there, pointing.

And, as if the elements had been listening, as we

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looked the veil lifted. A great white wall of snow and rock, all glimmery in the rising sun, rose above us. Way and away above it rose one majestic peak, so clean, so sharp, it looked as though it would have hurt to sit down on it. Swelling from its base ran a sharp ridge, which swept across to join the main range. And all beyond was clean blue sky.

With eyes bounded by long months of dripping jungle and a visibility of a hopeful fifty yards, we gazed and gazed.

The Doomworm broke the silence; for the first time for months he laughed outright and cracked his finger-joints. It hardly needed this to tell us there was something absolutely damnable in front of us.

Well, it would not do to show the Kitai folk we were puzzled. There was a sharp questioning from the Political. A hundred and fifty men and an officer the other side of the range. How many? A hundred and fifty. When did you last see them? Oh, a long while ago, before the big snowfalls made bad travelling on the pass. They gave us a store of rations, and orders to stay here. They don't bother with us much.

Well, we're going to meet them, and you'll have to come with us.

What? No fear. This is our post, and here we stay. Look; and he pointed to the banner. He pointed, too, at a flat face of rocks above the huts. The linguist translated the great sprawly characters carved in relief by patient toil: "The Outer Limit of the High Celestial Empire."

And here it dawned on us that *this*, this queer little problem, was what we had come all this distance to flatten out!

We could have mopped them up; but there

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was no sense in having a fight if we could argue, and anyhow they looked decent sorts, especially the sergeant. So Pardon-Howe spent a long day in argument. His was the patience of all big men; unhurried and persistent as dropping water, nobody in the end could resist the quiet force of the man. By tea-time the sergeant was cheerfully incapable of further argument, and ready to agree to anything.

Long before dawn the whole camp was up and stirring. The banner was removed. The incised rock had to stay, and is probably there still.

They showed us the way up the snow. The toil of that day up the pass few of us will forget, and none of us will care to describe. Constitutions sapped with incessant toil and steamy heat. Thin cotton clothes barely protected by blankets with a hole cut in the middle for the head to go through and belted on, poncho fashion. Burden of mind and body. A hundred and fifty men—*and* an officer. It sounded a problem.

By two, we topped the ridge. Luckily the thin icy air was still as still could be; the least wind, and our sweat-soddened clothes would have frozen on us. Hardly had we the energy to take in the wonderful panorama ahead of us—the downward sweep of the snow slope, dwindling off into a vast yellow plain backed by ridge after ridge of an unknown mountain system, apparently boundless east and west, and entirely unknown to geography.

We had expected a descent similar to the ascent. We had climbed goodness knew how high since the morning; but here, in front of us, the drop on to the tableland was a bare thousand feet.

Down the slope we slid and scrambled. Try how we would, any ordered formation broke up.

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It was a jumbled mob which dribbled out, an hour later, on to an open meadow of short grass. Alpine flora dotted the turf; dwarf rhododendron, bluest gentian, saxifrage, and, in one place, a great flat patch of flannel-textured edelweiss.

We swung forward and downward. On and on.

And there, ahead of us, lay the camp!

There was the rectangular enclosure, down by the thin stream of snow water. Good, stout, loopholed walls, clean surroundings, and all according to Cocker. And a blue-clothed Kitai sentry standing at the entrance.

We stopped to make some sort of formation, the Gurkhas in front and fanned out, to make the best show possible on few numbers; the coolies in a heap, behind; Pardon-Howe in front of all. Somebody urged him to keep back. Not he!

In this formation we swept down the open slopes; and, as we did so, the camp woke up. Kitais of all sorts, and all in rags of worn uniform, came out and stood in a group, unarmed, and watching. I do not think any of us quite expected this. It was in the nature of an anti-climax, after all that had gone before.

Our linguist stepped out and spoke up. Before he had said half a dozen words, two of the Kitais disappeared into the enclosure, and in a minute came forth. Between them they led a slim upright little man, straight and soldierly, in peaked cap and a clean khaki uniform. They led him up to where we were standing, and came to a stop.

The little man faced vaguely in our direction, drew himself up, and saluted. He dropped his hand. A vague nothingness lay over his wrinkled clean-cut features.

Dead silence.

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"Poor chap's blind," said Pardon-Howe in a whisper.

Blind he was.

Pardon-Howe put out a great red paw to take him by the hand; but the little man, sensing the loom of the great bulk in front of him, dropped to a crouching position. The long slim fingers came out, and tapped round the great worn boots; tap, tap, and pat, he felt his way up the stockings, fingering the loose breeches; rose to a half-crouch and then upright, and gently, so gently, fingered his way up; up and up, over the rugged bony face and broad cheekbones, to the great and shiny dome.

"Ah-h-h," he sighed gently; "the Bor Shap." And his hands fell back to his sides and his head drooped a little.

Pardon-Howe, absolutely at a loss, stood there without moving.

"Poor fellow, poor fellow."

Well, you know. . . .

. . . . . .

They led him back. The silence broke and the groups fell all ways, chattering. Some of the Kitai knew Yunnanese, and we got it out of them. They talked freely enough. He had had a go of snow-blindness—the usual thing; but ophthalmia had followed, and he had not known light from darkness these weeks past. They had known about our coming for some time. They had heard all about Pardon-Howe, and one gathers it was in terms in which the Sagas told of Thorfinn Karlsefne or of Hrolf the Ganger. What wonder that their leader longed to see; or, failing this, to touch?

And they were on their beam ends—down to nothing in food. The few Tibetan villages were

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worn thin with their exactions for months past, and were themselves on the verge of starvation; but the Lieutenant—the Tuchun, as his men called him, honorifically—would not let them take the last of it and drive out the people. In light or in darkness, he seems to have maintained a perfect discipline. Chao Erh-Fêng was dead; but his shadow lived.

They could not push forward; how could the Tuchun face the tribes below? A handful of rifles under a blind chief? The junglis would have made short work of them. And they could not go back, to starve in the cold wastes.

They were clean, dignified soldiers, sahibs all. They did not say it; but it was fairly obvious, in the end, that they were infernally glad we had come.

VI.

Well, you know, dammit, we couldn't make war on a blind man.

Pardon-Howe asked to see the Tuchun, and was taken to his tent. The little man received him courteously, feeling for a cushion for him, and remained standing in dignified silence till asked to be seated. Gently, and in tentative phrases, Pardon-Howe put it to him. Why stay here and starve? Why not accept the hospitality of the English and come down to India? *He* would see to it that no harm came to them. The junglis? Oh, the junglis . . . *those* monkeys; why. . . . He put out a hand to the Tuchun's knee; *I'll* see to you and your men all right if you'll come?

It was obvious, without saying, that all Pardon-Howe thought of was how to help a clean and

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decent soldier in a dire necessity. The expedition aspect of the thing, I am positive, never occurred to him. Here was a wholesome little sahib in a bad fix, and his decent following with him. . . .

Would he come ?

The little yellow hands fell outward in a resigned gesture. The shoulders shrugged.

Yes ; he would come.

" Right," said Pardon-Howe, " you'll not regret it."

He emerged, and, as usual, had his orders pat. In half an hour three Gurkha volunteers were off at their best pace. They carried a chit to Brodie at the nearest post, explaining the situation and requesting a second flying column to be slung out, by hook or by crook, with every ration they could lay hands on, current or reserve. Any risks to be taken. " Cut down all posts to the minimum possible. If the junglis try to look sticky, tell 'em I'll eat 'em. But push it along. Tell Macalister and Gordon, Fraser and Drummond. All posts to close forward, but leave the bridge pickets.

Quick's the word ! "

The Kitais were fed full on the best we could give them : rice, which they had not seen in all the weary time they had been living on—and loathing—the Tibetan tsamba ; full rations, though we cut ourselves down by a quarter and afterwards by a half, and were glad to do it, as we would have been glad to give our boots, for the Burra Sahib.

The Tuchun he took under his personal care, and kept with him day and night through the weeks of struggle which followed. The care he took of him ! To see that great bulk busy round the little man—almost fussing. . . .

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We got back somehow. The Kitai outnumbered us five to one, but never was there so much as a look askance or a sour word. They palled up with the Gurkhas; there was little to divide the two Mongol types. They camped clean, and fed clean, and left all clean behind them when they started each morning. They marched well. Each carried his pitiably small kit as well as his rifle, and I do not think one of them ever flagged in all the strain and scramble down to the base. Good men and fine soldiers; they came out of the ordeal with full marks.

The Tuchun we put in a *kilta* carrying-chair, carried on the back of one man. Three of our stoutest coolies, by turn, made light of the small bulk.

Pardon-Howe accompanied him always.

. . . . . .

We met Brodie when we were down to our last day's ration. He had brought everything needed, and had added an extra doctor-babu in case of a general breakdown. There was no breakdown. A week later we were into the regular line, and all was well. As we rolled it up we made a present of the contents of each post to the nearest jungli village. You should have seen them scramble. But we could not carry it.

As we had bluffed our way up, so we sailed easily down. There were those who foresaw a closing-in of the junglis and a riot round our rear; therewith disaster. But nothing of the sort happened. It takes a good soldier to retire with a sting in his tail; it takes a genius to withdraw, and the sting muzzled in a cheery indifference.

It had taken a year to lay out a line of communications 240 miles long by 18 inches broad.

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It took just a month to leave behind no trace of our work but the wire-slung bridges.

. . . . . .

The Kitai? A month after we got to head-quarters we got orders to send them down to the seaport. Whence, by easy ways and comfortable, they went round by sea to their homes again.

I am glad I did not see the leave-taking of the Tuchun and Pardon-Howe.

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V.

HIGHBROWS AND LOWBROWS.

It is the misfortune of any chronicler that he has to assemble scattered events, and to bring cause and effect into much closer time relationship than can possibly occur in real life. Also, he may not use names—that is, real names. So it is useless, after all these long years, to try to identify time or place or the people who walk through all these long pages. With this much said, let us get on with it.

The hinterland of one of the frontiers of India, a tangled mass of jungle, mountains, rivers, and unreliable savages, was experiencing an unusual period of quiet. The initial occupation; a subsequent invasion by a horde of noisy and stumbling regulars from India; a first-class political problem involving a year's struggle through the tangle to push back a Cathayan encroachment on the far side; and a steady solemn efficiency of handling by the Gurkhas of the Military Police under that incomparable Political Officer, Pardon-Howe—all these had left the frontier in a state of comparative stability in which no immediate problems seemed imminent. The 'Administered Line' ran roughly three marches in from the Political's headquarters on the north bank of the river, and here a succession of stockades peopled by unresting Gurkhas

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held the edge. A system of small flying columns kept the junglis from the inertia which breeds mischief, and all seemed fairly quiet for the moment.

His Excellency James Pascoe, Chief of the Local Government, Pardon-Howe's wise director and friendly colleague, read the latest batch of reports, pushed back his chair, and rubbed the spectacle-mark off the bridge of his nose. It would do. All was well for the moment.

He lurched over to his writing-table with his long loose stride, pulled a piece of paper towards him, and wrote to the man whom he trusted above all others. After a cheery and unpatronising form of "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," he announced his long-deferred intention of going home on leave—"and the Lord knows who they'll send as my locum; there's nobody in the immediate running. I only hope it won't be some silly ass from down-country, full of theories and ideas, who'll upset all your plans. But whoever it is, be patient with him. I'll tell him, when I hand over, not to bother you, and that he'd better let you alone to run the frontier without interference. So long, old man, and give all your stout lads my love."

Five days later it was handed to Pardon-Howe in durbar at a tribal conference, where he sat on a log, the rain dripping off the edges of his hat, and his pipe upside-down to keep it alight. The two Gurkhas who brought it barged unceremoniously through the squatting groups of tribesmen, treating the reeking assembly, very properly, as dirt. They came to a halt in front of the Burra Sahib, saluted punctiliously, and handed the message. They stood to attention while he read it; the Gurkha instinct, as of all born soldiers, knew the value of a little ceremonial on occasion.

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I.

The Line of stockaded posts ran, like Hadrian's Wall, along the ill-defined and fluid edge of Administered Territory. Here lay groups of Gurkha Military Police, whose nominal job it was to sit in their stockades and efface themselves, but who, in practice, pervaded everywhere in cheery indifference to a jungle population which lacked everything but leadership and a common purpose to make it aggressively hostile. At any moment it might have roared out into an avalanche of yelling fiends, who would have barged, to their ruin, in mobs against the walls of the stockades. As a matter of fact, the *émeute* never came off, and the occasional whumping and booming of war-gongs calling from village to distant village never portended anything worse than yet another conference of endless talk.

The Gurkha patrols, using path or dense jungle indifferently, went through the land in every direction. They lived, moved, and fought in a way which regulars thought unconventional, and which the tribes found embarrassing. They had untranslatable nicknames for all the principal natives, cocked their beaver at the girls, and swooshed out of the pathway any jungli whom they met; little swaggering lords of creation. The junglis hated and feared them; and the village maidens adored them, so clean, so saucy and debonair were they, and such a way with them. But discipline held good; and just as no jungli was ever a penn'orth the worse for the Gurk and his ever-ready kukri, so was there never so much as an arm's-length flirtation.

At Labêk stood the headquarter stockade of

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the Western Section. Here, perched on a cleared hilltop above the big straggling village, Crooke lived as O.C. the Line, and with him his adjutant, Macmillan. The remainder of his white officers had subsidiary groups of their own, east and west, and a cheerful elasticity of command pervaded the whole. There was much moving about, and little reporting. As Crooke said, if he had to be perpetually tagging round after his officers, they wouldn't be there; his show demanded the very best, and carried no passengers. He would happen in on them occasionally when he thought he wanted exercise, or they would drop into the headquarter stockade, and then Crooke's high nasal neigh rose and fell, and the news of the day would be swopped and the guest-chamber in the long hut would be swept and garnished, and the whisky bottle—one, or more, sometimes—would be routed out from a forgotten corner; and they would go to bed somewhere getting on for 1 A.M., all the better for a little unbending.

Good days.

Macmillan, the little, wiry, red-haired adjutant, the most silent man in Scotland or out of it, had all but a sinecure; the organisation was perfect, and ran on its own wheels. He and Crooke knew the very linings of each other's minds, and lived by what appeared to be a kind of telepathy, economising words. This, perhaps, was just as well. Crooke, for all his efficiency, and the affection he inspired among white men and Gurkha alike, was known as "The Doomworm." He had a way of getting fits of deep depression when there was nothing much on; and the despondent monologue, sometimes blazing out into pæans of lyrical abuse, would have been too much for any one if it had been encouraged. Macmillan was the very anti-

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dote for him, and the two opposites lived, month in and month out, in their narrow quarters with never the shadow of irritation between them. When the Doomworm had a fit on, Macmillan, who was one of the best pipers I have yet met, would reach down his pipes from the shelf and stroll out into the verandah. With a few preliminary shakes on the middle E, and a touch or two to his drones (they never took much tuning—the sodden climate kept the reeds in the pink of mellowness), he would break into quickstep or strathspey, and keep the wind steadily to the bag by the half-hour together. He would always finish on a pibroch, the Desperate Battle, or some fantastic composition of his own; and, as the long wild peals and hiccupping grace-notes rose and fell and rose again as the player worked himself up and up, so old Dooms would rumble off into grunts, which died away into a contented silence. There he would sit, while the wild music flooded the very souls of the two of them, his eyes fixed on space, and every wrinkle smoothed out of his worried old mind till he purred like a well-stroked cat.

Or sometimes Brodie or Fraser would be there, and there would be an evening of it, all in dead silence while the music lasted; and a flat blanket of quiet would overlie the chattery little Gurks in the barrack huts, the hillman in them responding to Macmillan. Why, the very village dogs forgot to howl and bicker when the thin far-away skirling floated down from the stockade.

Pardon-Howe shared occasionally in these gatherings on his rare tours of the Line. But mainly he kept away and left his officers to run things on the broad and simple lines which he had long ago laid down. His great and virile influence lay over the whole; but so long as things ran

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normally he refused to interfere in details, and left everything in trust to his chosen instruments on the spot.

Some weeks after the change of Chief, rumours began to penetrate to the outer edge of things. Correspondence commenced to arrive in Pardon-Howe's office with a frequency in strong contrast to the occasional notes scrawled, without the intervention of a secretary, by the late Head. Piecing together the interminable screeds with what he heard from infrequent visitors from head-quarters, he gathered that His Temporary Excellency Theophilus Barron, the new Chief, was all at sea in a frontier province, and regarded his new acquisition as a refreshing contrast to his previous experiences in densely packed Presidency towns down country; as a new toy, in fact. "And the Lord help us all if he's going to treat the nimble jungli as a plaything!" growled Pardon-Howe, as he waded through the wads of typescript. Much of the turgid rhetoric was pure nonsense; mentally you could see His Excellency dictating the polished phrases and resounding inanities to a stenographer, with due insistence on the *mot juste*, page on page worked up to some futile phrase voicing a 'bedrock principle,' which might have been Machiavelli, but which sounded suspiciously like Manchester.

The perfectly polite but somewhat laconic replies which came back did nothing to stem the flood, which finally settled down into a steady flow of questioning. Pardon-Howe's loosely knit but supremely efficient frontier administration was hardly adapted to statistics, and many a time he had to find new forms of politeness in which to regret his inability to supply the rubbish demanded of him, what time he raged inwardly.

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The next fit was a passion for ethnology. The Political knew all about his people, but was no word-monger to draw verbal pictures of them; and, when asked to search his files for past reports, could find nothing but one scrawl from an officer whom he had once sent on a distant reconnaissance among an unknown section of the tribes. It was crisp enough. His informant reported, *sans phrases*, that "the country is ——, and so are the people." As a study in hæmatics it might have been of use, but as an ethnological report it was frankly valueless. So, once more, Pardon-Howe had the honour to regret, &c., and, to his surprise, the correspondence came to an abrupt stop.

For weeks, great soggy chunks of silence filled the incoming dâkbag. Pardon-Howe wiped his brow, grabbed wood, and told himself that all was well.

Was it? No fear.

II.

The Doomworm sat on a camp-stool in the verandah of the mess hut, and burbled away to himself like a pensive kettle, communing in a querulous undertone with the circumambient moist world. The stockade was wrapped in a dense mist, as usual. Everything was wet, and the moist baccy in his pipe tasted sour. Macmillan was writing home letters. There was nothing doing.

The look-out sentry in the raised crow's-nest over the main gate whumped twice, briskly, on his gong. The Doomworm brightened at once. "Who's coming?" For answer, two soaked but cheerful riflemen were let in through the gate; a search inside a hat, and an oiled silk

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wrapper was produced and handed. D. retired under shelter and read the message—a courteous suggestion from Pardon-Howe that his presence was wanted at Base headquarters, and would he mind rolling up the marches into two days? Mind? Not he. It took half an hour to have a meal, load up the ever-ready trek-kit, and tell Macmillan to carry on for a while.

The evening of the next day found him slopping up the steps of the well-known guest-room at the back of the Political's bungalow; whence, dry-clothed, he strolled into the verandah, and was met by the wide grin of the Burra Sahib, who looked up from a sheaf of papers, lifted a simultaneous eyebrow and thumb in query, and was answered by a smile and a shake of the head. The unversed might have gathered the offer of a drink and its refusal; but what he would not have gathered from these two economical conversationalists was that Pardon-Howe was glad to see old Dooms again, and that the Doomworm found the sight of the cherished bald head more attractive than beer, as it bent once more to its work.

Presently Pardon-Howe swivelled round in his chair, reached for pipe and baccy, and became articulate. "Dooms," said he, "listen, and be patient while I tell you. I brought you down here because I'm in a bit of a fix. I'll tell it you all, and then we needn't comment on it, but just do as we're told. After all, temporary or permanent, the Chief's the Chief, and we'll leave it at that. You'll understand. Now, you remember our old man Pascoe went home on leave, and the present man unstuck himself from the fleshpots and acquired our frontier? Well, it seems he is rather interested in the new toy. He has been writing me letters, in sentences as long and shiny as a

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torchlight procession, and the file is, in all senses of the word, a bit thick. Imprimis, he disapproves of our unconventional ways of doing things. He thinks the junglis backward, and in need of improvement. And, finally, he is up against the fact that our geology, geography, and above all, ethnology, have never been reduced to classroom lecture form. So—and I gather this from Billy the Scribe—he has dug out an acquaintance of his who has written some clever stuff on the origin of highly classical Buddhist remains in Ceylon and the Madras side, and who may therefore be considered the right person to investigate the history of monkey-folk like ours, and is sending him up. We are to give him every facility when he arrives, and he is to be allowed to roam the country as he wishes; and gams and others are to flock to him and sit at his feet and speak him fair and give him polysyllabic information about their manners and customs, and what they can remember of the peculiar and personal private habits of their ancestors. *Our gams!* Yes, you may stare. Never mind; we've got to do it.

"When will the new man be coming? Dunno. Anyhow, we'll play up to it all; and I sent for you to ask if you'd put him up at Labêk and prevent him doing anything rash. Also, the junglis must give him what information you can devise, and at the same time mustn't be allowed to think we've got a mad sahib, or to panic, or do anything sudden or final. Understand? Think you can manage? It won't be for long, I hope. Anyhow, we've got to see it through. But the essential is that the jungli *isn't to panic.* You don't trust 'em? No; no more do I. But we've had worse jobs than this. . . ."

Pardon-Howe's clear unhurried articulation rolled

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and boomed about in the great air-passages behind his bony face, his laugh surging through caverns measureless to man. He lapsed into contemplation as they strolled across the lawn. Up and down. The frontier held them as it held us all, the damp and bitter present all aglow with patches of rosy past and a wide confidence in the future. . . .

Squawk! from under the verandah, and sker-WAWK! followed by a rattling of heavy wings and a crow like a cornet solo. "What *have* you got there?" "Oh Lor', I suppose you've got to know about that too. Come and see," and they passed under the raised *chang* which supported the bungalow to where a massive crate lay among the empty packing-cases and litter. In the crate were four immense fowls, russet, very tall and heavy of body, and muscular. They apparently weighed fifteen pounds apiece. And, while the two watched, one of them reached out and dealt the crate a resounding hatchet blow with his beak, raised his great head and neck through the top, and once more let out a deafening crow.

"Where *did* you get them?"

"He sent them; calls them Rhode Island Reds; thinks our jungle fowls want improving, and I'm to hand these out to the villages to improve the stock, *and* I'm to report on the result. Our puir wee jungli hens! . . . And look here, too," and he led the way on to another slightly smaller crate; "did you ever see anything like it?" This crate contained half a dozen fowls which looked as if they had stood too long tail-to-wind. All their feathers grew the wrong way, pointing forwards instead of backwards, and fluffed out into a kind of untidy fur. You never saw anything so grotesque. "Yes, they're real; special breed, he says: Frizzles, or some name like that. Says

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that if they cross with the local breed, the result will be unmistakable. I shouldn't wonder! But I'm blessed if I'll issue these; the junglis would panic straight away. Talk about the evil eye. . . . There were some fan-tailed pigeons and a brindled bull-terrier on the invoice, too, but the boatmen say they were never handed over. Lost them overboard, likely as not.

"Well, you see how it is; we're in for a cycle of improvement on scientific lines. And it's up to you and me and the rest of us to see it through, strictly and accurately. You can trust your lads, I know. Well, just tell 'em we're all in the same boat. You needn't tell 'em I'm worried about it. And you'll make it easy for the junglis, won't you? Right. Let's eat."

The Doomworm strode back to his stockade next day. He neither groused nor grumbled; but a subdued glint of battle shone in his eye, as always when something difficult and ominous portended. A mile behind his long strides, his kit and his orderly toiled along. From the tail of the small procession, where swung a crate between two staggering carriers, emanated noises of the clarionet, cockatoo noises, noises like chopping wood, and occasionally an ear-splitting crow. . . .

A week later, Crooke and Macmillan returned to the stockade from a visit to neighbours. They were met at the gate by the old Subadar.

"A sahib has come."

"Wha's that, Subadar Sahib?"

"A sahib has come. He is a strange sahib, talking only Angrézi, and brings a Madrassi servant, very sick, who will answer no questions. The sahib is in the Mess-kôt."

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They exchanged glances fraught with weighty understanding. "Subadar Sahib, this was foreseen. I will attend to it." And to Macmillan, "He's arrived. Never mind. Pull up your socks. Here beginneth the first lesson," and he strode in under the gateway.

They found a little, fussy, undersized man, who rose from a chair in the verandah and introduced himself as Major Alexander Grant, recently of the Madras Presidency, and, more remotely, of Inverness. Despatched on a special mission and "services placed at the disposal of the Local Government for purposes of archæology." Also—and here the least little touch of *de haut en bas* peeped through—the bearer of a letter.

He presented it with an air.

Pardon-Howe's rarely used red-crested stationery became apparent. It was obvious that nothing was to be lacking in the induction of Athene to the land of Bœotia.

Crooke and Macmillan, wise in their all-weather knowledge of men, took the whole thing with a grave courtesy. For all their grimy and unbuttoned daily existence, and this utterly unusual responsibility which had been thrown upon them, they rose to the occasion. The meeting might have been that of diplomats on a Persian carpet, with a ramrod-backed footman standing by the door, instead of three soaked and sodden officers foregathering in the dingiest and most recently mapped corner of the Indian Empire. Besides, the man was obviously clean-bred, a fact not even obscured by the unnecessarily polysyllabic phrases in which he explained his arrival; and to one, at least, of them he was a fellow-countryman. Also, he looked damned tired, poor chap. Wonder when he last had a meal?

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Crooke, in chosen phrases and a punctilious hospitality, began to inquire as to his creature comforts. In five minutes all pretence and any pretentiousness broke down. The *grand seigneur* manner thawed under the pressure of admitting that he had come lamentably ill-equipped for jungle travel; that his Madrassi bearer was worse than useless; that he had marched too far and too fast; had lain awake all the previous night with a bad dose of fever and no quinine; and finally, that he had had no proper meal since passing through Pardon-Howe's headquarters.

Crooke and Macmillan stared at him.

"Look here, old thing. I don't want to be rude and all that; but we've been talking like Boston schoolmarms while you ought to have been in bed. Come along."

He took him firmly by the upper arm and led him gently down the verandah to the sleeping quarters. Here he literally stripped him, put him in a warm bath, and examined him all over for leeches, Grant submitting with gradually weakening protests. Thereafter, clean pyjamas lent for the occasion, a comprehensive wrap in a woolly blanket (the poor devil was shivering and beginning to lose his hold on things), and a tuck-up under a mosquito curtain. He woke him ten minutes later for a bowl of hot soup and twenty grains of quinine, both watched to destination, and, "Now then, don't you bother about anything else; we'll look after you," as the shaking hand passed out the empty basin and he whispered a half-finished thanks into the pillow.

"Sacr-r-ré aristo! Be blowed to his magniloquence! What *he* wants is a nurse. Rotten shame to send a chap like that to a country like this."

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He slept a straight fourteen hours and woke to further ministrations. Thereafter rose, and, a day later, he began a chapter in our history, the end of which none of us could possibly have foreseen.

III.

Here or hereabouts let us take leave to digress, and see the scope of the Problem—the muddy pool which the stick of Inquiry was to stir, and the results to be hoped from the stirring.

The junglis, as found in the part of the world with which we deal, are those who fell by the way when the big Tibetan Drift, countless unrecorded ages ago, oozed southward, the outermost waves of the drift reaching Borneo by way of Assam, Burma, and Siam. Their ancestors must, even then, have carried in them the seeds of a laziness apparent to this day, and have failed to keep the virile impulses of the Main Drift, thereafter getting bogged in the dense jungles and adapting themselves to submersion by their surroundings. The laziness must have been moral rather than physical, in that it produced that most unvirile state of affairs—a thorough-going democracy in which all discipline and leadership were lost and the habit of massed chinwag was allowed to harden into an institution. The entire vocabulary consists of some three hundred words, wherein, though there may be ten words for rice between the time when it goes into the ground and the day it comes to table, yet they cannot express a non-concrete idea even by a circumlocution. Arithmetic reaches a dozen, and thereafter vagueness of many, much, or little. Why a dozen? The jungli is a secretive bird, even in his family circle. You and I count

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openly, in tens, on our finger-tips. The jungli, with half-closed left hand, calculates with his thumb-tip against the four sets of three inner phalanges of his fingers, where the eye may not follow.

Withal, he is a mean fellow, with a hole-and-corner mentality. He never looks you in the face when he speaks; he has seven different underhand ways of slaying game; and his untrustworthiness gives rise to the saying that in all his statements the jungli sticks so closely to the truth that it is impossible to get it from him.

Their war system is no system, in that it is the antithesis of any organisation. And though any one village might at any moment, and for reason good or bad, rise with a whoop like a flock of starlings and go bald-headed at the enemy of the moment, yet (and it was our great asset) inter-village liaison or cohesion was impossible in warfare conducted on the principles of hysteria. All the same, they were dangerous, damned dangerous. Theirs was the instability of nitro-glycerine or of fulminate of mercury. If you put your hat down carelessly on either, you would go through the roof.

This communal system—to get it within the four corners of a definition—seems, on the whole, to be less a Democracy than a negation of any form of discipline, since discipline is not the fact of putting men up in a row and shouting at them, but is, by definition, Organised Self-control. With them there is no public opinion to limit wrongfulness of action, and active misbehaviour is only kept in check by fears of retaliation. Their only virtue is their splendid physique; while the only limitation on an openly vicious life seems to be either immaturity or anno domini.

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There is, however, in all this a praiseworthy consistency, in that it is the most complete and final expression of individualism and self-determination, and the working out of the principles of a pandemic democracy to a logical conclusion. The interest of the individual is paramount to the eventual exclusion of the good of the community. They are impenitent and, hitherto, uncorrected. Their isolation—both physical, on account of their jungle setting, and moral, due to the reluctance of other tribes to have dealings with a people as explosive and untrustworthy as a badly made firework—has so far prevented their indisciplined and non-moral attitude to life from being their undoing.

To such a people came the linguo-historico-ethnological brainstorm-merchant, Major Alexander Grant (sometime of Inverness, but now recovering from a bad go of quartan ague in Labêk stockade). He proposed to put them neatly into a volume of records, with a foundation of Tibeto-Burman lore and collateral excursions into totemism, Buddhism, animism, and a dozen other learned by-products and definitions. Summarised, in simple language the question seemed to be, "What are their Manners and Customs?" The answer, to us who knew them, was too easy. They had neither. They seemed, indeed, to have replaced this almost universal duality by Habits and by Impulses, from the examination of which, in the end, neither profit nor edification resulted.

Grant, full of enthusiasm and energy, was cheerfully ignorant of all this. Nor were we, with our definite orders to give him all the rope he wanted, the people to enlighten him. The Doomworm, who only groused at the smaller worries of life, set his loyal old headpiece to the carrying

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out of Pardon-Howe's orders, and at the same time kept a wary eye on the possibilities of tribal explosions. Macmillan, inscrutable and silent, surveyed the problem with steely grey eyes through sandy eyelashes. The two of them together—aye, and every man of us with them—were a coiled spring; and the mechanism which held it tight-coiled was our utter and unswerving loyalty to the great bald head of Pardon-Howe, whom, as you may by now have gathered, we worshipped.

Grant got to work. We gave him, as orderly, our most intelligent Gurkha, one Ranbir Gurung, one of our few who had a smattering of tongues; the Madrassi bearer, helpless and inefficient in these new and virile surroundings, retired into the background. We trotted out the *kotoki*, or local interpreter, and sat him on the verandah while Macmillan expounded to his reluctant ear the whole duty of intercommunication between Grant and jungledom. We made all as smooth as we could, but the Doomworm exacted only one rigid condition: there must be no visiting of villages in the hunt for information; all people to be interviewed must come to the stockade. Nor was Grant, unversed in pathless jungles, to go anywhere without an adequate and intelligent escort of our providing. For the rest, he had a free hand; and after he had discovered that we, perfectly politely, were unable to enlighten him on any question of ethnology, history, language, or any alleged manner or custom, we gave him a rough list of meal-hours, and turned again to our daily tasks.

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IV.

There was much coming and going. There were interviews. Grant, the kotoki, and the leading local gam held interminable *tête-à-têtes* in a hut outside the main gate. Grant scribbled voluminous notes, while Ranbir squatted in silence in the background. There were hours on hours when Grant wrote furiously on the mess-table, sheet after sheet of loose foolscap, and as furiously tore them up again. The wind blew them about. The Doomworm, painfully faddy about the cleanliness of his stockade, would presently call the Madrassi and make him clear up the mess before meal-times. The Madrassi objected. He was, I think, the laziest and sulkiest rotter who ever emerged from the Benighted Presidency. He had a name as long as a goods train—Anantaswami Venkatachellam Mudalliar, to be exact,—but at the end of a week Macmillan christened him "The Erg," and the name stuck (an erg apparently being a unit of horse-power in the movements of molecules, and therefore the smallest known force in Nature). And he was dirty—dirty in a land where, to white man or brown, neglect of cleanliness was the shortest of steps to the hospital.

The interviews went on. But now definite hitches commenced to show up. One morning the gam was not forthcoming, and a message, through Ranbir, to the village, elicited the unconvincing answer that he had gone on a journey, for many days, and that his return was problematical. But Ranbir, resourceful chap, brought back the female oldest inhabitant, white-haired, skinny and astonishingly dirty, and dumped her down in the hut. "There, sahib; try *her* with a few

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questions!" Grant, joyful at this new departure, did so. What he asked her in the interests of science must have astonished a dame who, for the past thirty years, had probably ceased to think of such things. Anyhow, so Ranbir told us, the effect was remarkable. The old puss reached out a skinny and begrimed paw and deliberately stroked Grant's face, straight down from his hair, over his nose, and down his chin, what time she murmured "ka-linga," or, as one might say, "tootsy-wootsy!"

Grant fled.

That night the kotoki got suddenly and most surprisingly drunk, was bunged into the Quarter Guard, and woke with a muzzy explanation of mental confusion produced by his new duties and the necessity for some such relief.

One way and another there was a hitch, and Grant took a breathing-space—from interviews, at any rate. He never ceased scribbling, however, though what he found to write about passed our understanding.

We—always and invariably, deliberately and purposely—refused to butt in. Our duties began and ended with giving the principal characters a fair field and no favour, thereafter confining ourselves to holding the ring and keeping a watchful eye lifting for trouble.

Though we refused to discuss ethnology, in one way a discussion arose which I, for one, will not forget. Grant and Macmillan, compatriots, were of an equal keenness and enthusiasm on Highland lore. One evening Macmillan, coming in from an unusually exhausting trek to a distant village, got out the rarely used whisky bottle. I left them at 9 P.M. But at 11, the sleep of the stockade being valuable and unnecessary noise from the

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Mess discouraged, I got out of bed to see what it was all about. The doorway was blocked by the huge form of Asghar Ali, the veteran mess-khitmatgar. He stood staring into the room, and muttering into his white beard something about "burra sharm ki bàt," or a mild disapproval of unseemly conduct. Over his shoulder I caught a glimpse of Macmillan and Grant. They were clothed in their shirts only; they were down on their hands and knees; Grant had a tartan travelling-rug spread on the floor, also a trunk strap. In a staccato monotone in which the careful formation of each word seemed a matter of concern to him, he was explaining to Macmillan exactly how he viewed the problem of folding a plaid into the proper pleating of the *feile mhor*, Macmillan disagreeing the while. The demonstration came to an end when Grant, having arranged plaid and strap to his liking, attempted to roll over backwards on to it and buckle it round his waist, Macmillan being apparently unwilling, or possibly unable, to help him straighten matters. . . .

Desipere in loco! Let be. It probably did them both a world of good.

Grant, whose male sources of information seemed to have taken on a persistent absenteeism, and the female sources not again to be lightly attempted, turned to Ranbir. The Gurkha had a working knowledge of the local tongue, and had somehow acquired an enthusiasm for this weird highbrow whose ways were so incomprehensible. He took to going off on his own. We let him, knowing he would avoid trouble. And, whether bred of keenness, or due to a vivid imagination, each evening would see him spinning long yarns to Grant. At one time he spent many days running about with

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a twigful of leaves; the junglis had a way of snipping bits out of their dogs' ears to mark village ownership, the permutations and combinations being many. Grant was writing a futile chapter on the subject, with illustrations; it was Ranbir's duty to take leaves to each village and to snip them in accordance with the dogs' ears. He began by investigating the dogs, but had to fall back on the owners after incidents involving bandages and iodine.

Ranbir worked hard and keenly, but even he could not satisfy Grant's thirst for exact statistics. Energy, not accuracy, was his line. Grant, quite unfairly, would flare out at him, abuse him as no rifleman ought to be abused, and send him flying to his quarters on the wings of a stream of adjectives. Then he would stride into the office and demand to be "relieved of the co-operation of a man who, if he wanted to count above ten, would have had to take his boots off." Poor Ranbir! He worked like a Trojan all through. How many white men would have stuck the half of what he got?

The inevitable intervals when facts, mostly irrelevant, were being collected, Grant spent spasmodically in buttonholing junglis—if the word may be used of people innocent of anything to button—and in bribing them with sticks of tobacco to stand still while he fingered their skulls and took photographs at all angles; but this again came to a stop when word went round that evil lurked in the little black box.

One way and another the thing was beginning to be intractable, and we several times narrowly missed the beginnings of a bad row. So a sigh of relief went up when Grant developed still another side to his amazing character—zoology. As you would have expected, Grant being Grant, the



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first erratic development it took was a mania for snakes. In some way he managed to work round to the subject *viâ* arrow-poisons, which, however, have nothing to do with snakes, being entirely vegetable. But for once he had struck something which the jungli thoroughly understood, snakes in our jungles being as common as black-beetles in a kitchen. They were unusual in the cleared precincts of the stockades, being generally shy; but on the paths you might meet a dozen a day, of all lengths and colours. It was interesting to see a jungli when he met one; the sudden cramping of the muscles to rigid stillness, and the slow careful withdrawal, accompanied by an indefinable whistling intake of breath—"sgee-e-e-e!" The slow draw of the dah, the poise and lightning stroke, when the Enemy of Man fell into two contorted halves, and was flicked into the bush.

Grant was seized with a desire for a really big cobra, something to hang superlatives on in his report. He sent Ranbir round announcing a rupee reward for any really good specimen of a cobra, produced alive at the stockade gate a week later. The day came, and Grant emerged to find a considerable line of junglis squatting in the clearing near the main guard, each with the biggest thing in cobras he could lay his hands on. There must have been twenty at least, each done up in a bit of basket, or any odd strip of cloth. Each, with due precautions, was exhibited to Grant, who chose one, paid for it, killed it, and carried it off in its basket to beg a pint of methylated off the doctor-babu wherewith to pickle it. Suddenly there arose the father and mother of a hoo-hah at the main guard. The remaining and unsuccessful junglis, having no further use for their cobras, opened their various receptacles and told the

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contents to hook it; with the inevitable result that the place was soon a mass of confused and very peevish snakes, each with a grudge against things in general, and ready to get a bit of its own back. It took three of us the rest of the day to ferret them out with shot-guns, and there were several narrow escapes.

Thankful we were that his ambitions for outsize snakes did not run to hamadryads. Hamadryad? The big King Cobra who, apart from his power to inject about a teaspoonful of instant and painful death, is the only snake with a long-range habit of vindictive attack. Usually a close inspection of this large and spitefully aggressive snake is only possible when it has been reduced to pulp, blown about by a charge from a 12-bore, or variously bedevilled by a concourse of sticks. But what was probably a unique specimen, in that it was undamaged, was one day collected and presented to Grant. And, at the risk of a digression, the way of it was this:—

By chance a portion of the stockade-line had to be inspected and a post on the Main River rebuilt. The river at this time of year was covered with floating débris from collapsed jungle on the banks; this would surge and bump down the rapids, or swim lazily across intervening pools. As this scribe stood on the bank, a big half-submerged cottonwood floated by, and among the upturned roots lay coiled the very last word in hamadryads. The heavy black head raised itself to inspect the sandbank; the thick greasy coils unfolded, and the snake swam ashore, where he strolled up the bank unconcernedly, yard on yard of him. Deponent fled; it was no time to stand on the order of one's going with a hamadryad approaching, however leisurely. Not so Johnny Gurk, standing

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by. "Whoop! a snake!" and a big billet of wood poised; wallop, on to the snake.

"Good lord, *now* you've done it; he'll see red!"

Not he. The missile, by all things lucky, caught him on the cervical vertebræ, and there he lay, stunned, and absolutely undamaged.

A careful approach and a prolonged inspection confirmed the lack of damage.

Can we secure him? We'll try. A stout log is rolled on to him, pinning him six inches behind the head, and a Gurk put to sit on each end. That's made all safe for democracy, anyhow. But he can't remain like that for ever. Hey, Babu-ji—to the doctor-babu visible in the dispensary—a pound of cottonwool and the chloroform bottle, quick! The wool is made into a cup and soaked in chloroform. This, in a long cleft cane, is smothered over the head of the hamadryad. Prolonged and anxious pause. And then he woke up. The loose yards of him flicked and belted about like summer lightning, and the sand flew in wisps, but the superimposed Gurks stuck to their log, and there was no biting. Jove, he was furious! The doctor-babu danced about on alternate legs in an agony of apprehension, hugging the bottle and venting himself in highly technical war-cries—the complete advisory anæsthetist; the crowd cheered and hurled abuse; the chloroform cap stuck to its work.

Presently the threshing grew less; the coils formed and straightened and twisted again. Persistence got it, in the end; in five minutes it was a-twitching; in ten all was still. The cottonwool was wrapped and poked round the head, and a flat stone put on top to keep all snug. Not till a quarter of an hour of immobility had passed was it safe to remove the log. Then poke and push

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him a bit. Nothing doing. Clean dead; suffocated; and ab-so-lutely undamaged.

Stretch him between pegs and measure him. Twelve feet five and a half inches. A unique prize.

Now how to pickle him. Methylated spirit by the gallon forms no part of jungle equipment. No; but ration rum does. A 4-gallon keg of proof spirit was dug out of the ration-godown. The bung was knocked out and the hole enlarged, allowing of the insertion of the hamadryad, which was passed in hand over hand. The hole was filled in and sealed down. The keg was presently despatched, with compliments, to Grant, who, with its help, rounded off an entirely unnecessary chapter of his writings with an exclamatory passage worthy of the Great Sea Serpent.

Thence back to the local H.Q. for tea with Phayre, our one white doctor. In the middle of this an agitated and rather exhausted messenger arrived from Labêk, three marches distant, bringing an urgent chit from Grant. What's up now? The chit, on being opened, contained a demand for information on what appeared to be a question of tribal obstetrics, and was passed to the doctor for elucidation—who tore it up.

V.

Grant was undoubtedly writing a book, though he never said so. He had had a row with the one really scientific Society to which he belonged—one of his many unnecessary rows. But, from veiled hints, one gathered that he hoped to read his interminable memoir before one of the semi-learned Societies, to audiences composed of middle-

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aged babblers 'interested' in savages and unusual places, who had never been a mile from a cooked dinner in their lives. He would strew the mess-table and floor with sheets of manuscript, and meals for all of us became fitful—and ourselves fretful—in trying to get him to clear the decks and let us get at the table. His *sotto voce* hints at the nature of his ploy were confirmed by the finding of a loose sheet blown out on to the parade ground, 'Chapter 23,' and bearing the chortly title of 'Bodily Oddities.' . . .

Were we never to be rid of this incubus, this nightmare, this Old Man of the Sea? Days and weeks passed, till we forgot when we had last had a sound meal or a normal life. Tempers wore thin; Ranbir, even, lost his enthusiasm; and the junglis grew increasingly restive, whatever Crooke did to pacify them, at what they came to think of as a meddlesome inquisitiveness. It was impossible even to offer them the excuse that the sahib had bats in his belfry, and must be humoured, since the jungli tradition of how to treat a lunatic was altogether too abrupt and gory. What made it worse was that he could never stick for long to one line; it was snakes, or anthropometry, or dogs' ears, or heredity, or weather, or questions which—to my mind rightly—the junglis regarded as hitting below the belt. And still he wrote and wrote. I read all the stuff many months later. He had a genius for wrapping up the minimum of information in the maximum of verbiage. His statements, as long as his family tree, had as many collaterals. It seemed impossible for him to keep to the point for long, and a superabundant imagination backed by extensive reading spread his ideas athwart his neat manuscript with the catholic embrace of a Virginia creeper.

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The temptation to pull his leg was insistent, as, for instance, to tell him of the five-toed crocodile (a rare species); or about the man-eating thunder bug; or about the uhu bird, he that flieth backward to keep the sand out of his eyes. But it would have been too easy. Also, it would have gone down in the book, and his facile audiences in England might have finished by taking the stories *au grand sérieux*. We refrained.

But the man was a sahib all right; to the very last he never said or did anything offensive; nor, in spite of the unending worry we got from him, did he ever get cross word or crooked answer from us.

There was a tedious gap when absolutely nothing happened, and the clouds, which usually only poured warm water on us, rained ramrods. The whole world went out in a sea of dense mist, where you breathed as much water as air, and the toadstools and mushrooms grew on the boots while you watched them. We played a good deal of bridge, I remember, of the elementary sort played in those days before auction; Macmillan very silent and inscrutable, Grant ex-treme-ly-pre-*cise*, and calling everything by its severely correct title; and the old Doomworm raving to Heaven at regular intervals about the shortcomings of a hand which, as he truly said, Job would have hesitated to sit down on.

And then for days we would sit and smoke and do nothing but watch the inside of Niagara as viewed through the doorway. Grant even seemed to have written himself to a standstill.

Presently the season eased up a bit. Macmillan got a brain-wave, and went off to a neighbouring village to fetch the local witchcraft artist. His arrival was as good as a sherry and bitters to Grant; bucked him up no end.

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Religion!

The writer had to go off on an extended job just then. He left the two hard at it, immersed in the hoips and godwots of a monkey mythology.

. . . . . .

Returning a fortnight later, he found an ugly state of affairs.

Grant was missing.

With him Ranbir; also the Madrassi.

The three had been absent twenty-four hours, and anxiety growing acute, Crooke had examined the kit and gear left behind. From evidence of what was taken and what left it became clear that the three had pushed off on their own, with an extended absence in view, since considerable foodstuffs had gone with them. Strangely, the main gate sentries knew nothing. Grum Sahib came and went, and nobody said him nay; wasn't he always talking to the villagers? Ranbir? The Madrassi? They may have come and gone. There was the cook-house outside. . . . Had they all gone out together? No; of that there was positive denial.

So there had been a rendezvous outside. Cunning fox, Grant. Damn the fellow! But further consideration modified this a little. Inconsequent, hectic, unbalanced, his subject had become an obsession with him. The long gaps and delays must have maddened him; possibly he had at length realised what screeds of tosh he was writing, on the strength of what little real information. He must have resolved to cut the painter and go and hunt his subjects for himself; and that he might take all the blame when it came to the inevitable investigation, and we be held blameless, he had resolved to abscond. I am positive his first impulse was to go solus, by his lone; but the

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kit must have puzzled him, and Ranbir's help was enlisted to carry it. The Erg was probably roped in at the end, as, with an armful of parcels, one grabs up the canary cage last of all, absent-mindedly.

Well, there it was, you know. We were done. Ponk. Had for mugs.

Why didn't we dart out in a dozen different directions, send out search parties, raid villages, hold gams to hostage, and generally land ourselves in chaos with a capital K, till Grant was found? The answer lies in the jungli mentality. Has mother lost a diamond brooch, and does she dash into the nursery screaming? She doesn't. There would be panic; there would be tears and hysteria, and anything might happen. So here; with the added certainty that if the junglis once panicked, they would do the primitive and sudden thing which would first occur to their brutally elementary minds, and murder Grant.

Softlee, softlee, catchee monkey. . . .

Literally and simply we sat down and waited. We simply dared not let it be known that Grant was astray, unescorted, and ourselves anxious. There was no central authority in whom we could trust enough to confide; no controlling influence among these mischievous simians; no centre whence even rumour might be obtained. The maddening and unvarying futility of Democracy!

Let those blame us who know nothing of living in the midst of a powder-magazine, wherein the sudden and ungoverned hysteria of masterless man might be the spark to explode, and send half a thousand miles of Pax Britannica to join the atoms. Suffice it that Pardon-Howe, warned at once by swift runner, endorsed our inaction. Wise, wise; never a thought crossed his great cool brain of

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railing at us as careless slackers, or at Grant as an adjective highbrow playing ducks and drakes with a frontier the peace of which was balanced on a knife-edge. To him—Burra Sahib and personal, individual Providence to ten thousand lives—no puzzle came amiss or found him wanting, from a problem in intuitive psychology like this to the red rage of a hand-to-hand fight in the jungle. John Nicholson must have been just such another.

We waited. Deliberately, not one atom of the usual routine was altered. To the men, not a word. In front of the servants, not a word. To the gams and junglis, least of all. Among ourselves, little, though the fear lay on us like a cold wet cloth, and the inaction galled us. Grant astray, Grant lost, Grant amid snakes and leeches; in exhaustion, starvation, wanderings. . . . Grant grabbed by junglis and tied hand and foot; Grant beset at close quarters, the Scot in the bloodless savant making one last merry fight of it; Grant, at the last—and surely not till then,—calling clear for help, and we not there to give it.

And still we waited.

The man whose unbalanced actions had made life complicated for us while he lived with us, who had doubled our work and halved our joys; this intruder from another sphere at the bidding of an opinionated egotist set, for a time, in a high place; this utter negation of the peace and privacy of our jungles. Weren't we glad, in the end, to be quit of him? Most emphatically, we were not. The man was a sahib; he was of our blood; he was one of us; aye—put it fairly and squarely—we had grown damn fond of the weird and whimsical old juggins, and not one of us but would gladly have cut off his right hand to see him safely back among us, and late once more for dinner.

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VI.

The days grew to a week, the week to ten days. It neared a fortnight since he had gone, and we could stand it no longer. Sitting apart, we lapsed into the shepherd tongue of the corries, lest eavesdroppers should overhear, and took counsel. But got no nearer solution.

Next morning, rumours trickled in. The old Subadar was the first; tentatively and cautiously, as of one intruding on a family misfortune. "Was it true that Grum Sahib was away, was lost? Had we by chance heard—hem, hem—no matter."

"Wha's that, Subadar Sahib?"

"Oh, a mere nothing; these junglis . . . tattle . . . can't be anything in it. Grum Sahib. . . ."

By ten o'clock it grew to an insistent rumour. By mid-day it was fairly and squarely out, and the local gam, now in handcuffs in the Quarter Guard, had, under considerable pressure, admitted that he had known it for two days. Grant had been murdered; done in.

The truth, and the whole truth, came to us in bits, then and much later, by a dozen devious and independent ways; and as fast as the bits came to us, so we passed them on swiftly to Pardon-Howe, who waited, like an electric storm in leash, on the southern horizon. So the whole dismal story might as well be told now. Poor old Grant.

To begin with, one must know a peculiar fact about the junglis. Illiterate, unwilling to trust one another with verbal messages, they had evolved a kind of message-letter in their communications. A few grains of rice, a fragment of cane-matting, a toucan feather, and five pebbles, all done up in a small basket and sent from one gam to another,

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would be sufficient to bid him to a dinner (rice) inside the sender's house (cane matting) at five hours past noon on the following day, and it would be a big show involving dressiness (toucan's feather). An arrow-head, a piece of the wood from which canoes are made, a bit of bootlace or anything identifiable with the white man, and an indeterminate lump of clay as a question mark, would read, "War on the white men in the stockade near the river bank; what do you think of it?" Answer, two arrow-heads, "Rather!" Or half an arrow-head, "Bide a wee!" All things red mean blood or bloodshed, or an instant call to arms; all things black, death, or any form of emphasised finality. And so it goes on.

Well, as exactly as we could gather it, what had happened was this. Grant, with Ranbir carrying the kit for both of them, and The Erg—one imagines, carrying nothing at all,—met on the main northward path out of view of the stockade. Grant had probably planned it all, and shaped up the supplies and kit. From this point they went due north at a fair speed till they reached the limits of what we called Administered Territory, and thereafter steadily into the northward mountains. Grant probably hoped for all sorts of interesting information by frankly casting loose from our area and diving straight into the unknown. Possibly he misjudged us enough to think that our chaperonage was a deliberate obstacle put in the way of his researches.

In four days they seem to have covered what was a fair six marches, and reached a large village called Mu Fereang, where Grant walked boldly up to the gam's house, made a leg, and uttered conciliatory noises; and settled in. Jove, the man had a nerve. Not one of us would have cared to do a

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thing like that. The gam, utterly flabbergasted, seems to have done nothing. The arrival was discussed heatedly in the village parliament, but the situation seemed absolutely without precedent, and nothing came of the talking.

Next day Grant, wise enough not to show himself abroad in the village, started on the gam with his interminable questions. He had picked up a good deal of the jungli speech during his stay at Labêk, and could make himself understood. He seems to have avoided the worst snags of his earlier researches, but there must have been enough in the remainder to drive the gam and his entourage, from day to day, into sullenness, hostility, and finally, a smouldering rage. Who was this confounded white man who plagued them for ever with his pestilent curiosity? What the . . .? Why the . . .? The junglis, as ever, dissembled, and Grant knew less and less of the volcano on which he sat. Word began to go abroad that he was hatching a mischief against the Upper Tribes; that he was gathering data for an invasion, a numbering of the people, and a poll-tax—the same tax as that enforced in the Lower Territories. Things smouldered; the village parliament, in the young men's hut, was in plenary and permanent session.

About this time Grant began to run short of stores. The cheek of his own outbreaking must have lost its novelty, and the situation normalised by the apparent absence of search or excitement at his departure. Anyhow, quite calmly, he took a sheet of official foolscap (we saw it later) and wrote his amazing request for jam, marmalade, and potted meat. A stickler for the niceties of correspondence, he enclosed it in a long official envelope, gummed it down, and sealed it with a

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liberal dose of unnecessary sealing-wax. He gave it to Ranbir, and told him to make a bee-line for Labêk and bring back what was wanted.

Ranbir for once lost his way, wandered far, and fetched up at an unknown village. There they took him in and fed him (he had an insinuating way with him, had Ranbir), and gave him liberally of the local barley-brew, he being as near exhausted as makes no matter. His tongue was loosened, and cheerily he descanted on the importance of his sahib and the weighty news which he carried—a bit of unnecessary bombast which cost him his life, poor chap, for while he slept they searched his kit, found the long official envelope, panicked, and killed him.

Now, in those days—and it was long ago—England was in mourning for a sovereign recently dead; and all official envelopes, in addition to the leaded black type of "On His Majesty's Service," bore a heavy black border. The junglis stared at Grant's innocent letter. There it was; black, black, lots of it. Turn it over. Great red blobs—red for blood, red for a call to arms! Everything they had heard of the strange sahib sitting in Mu Fereang now bore sinister confirmation. There would be troops, and fighting; bloodshed; and thereafter a numbering of the people. And taxes.

Before poor Ranbir's body had even been decently hustled into the jungle, runners were off at top speed. Dawn found Grant, surprised in his sleep, bound hand and foot, and doubly bound in swathe on swathe of tough cane.

The Erg, poor worm, raised a silly outcry; they seem to have swiped him out of existence, as you would a fly.

Things moved quickly. For once there was

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no chinwag. Bomlaw the gam and Lapok the wizard took Grant in charge. A mob of grimy savages grabbed him and carried him at a run, shoulder high, to the *dumbang*, the village place of sacrifice, beneath the big Rami tree in the sacred grove near-by, the place where they made their mean and grubby little sacrifices to the *nats* of the tree, a time-worn fowl, a jungle rat, or what-not.

They untied his legs and stood him up; the villagers retired, and left the three of them.

Grant, dry-as-dust savant, most superfluous highbrow in the street-arab pigsty of jungledom, was clean grit all through. He stood there and faced it out, a dingy and a lonely death. It is good to think of him, at the last, holding up his head and looking it all fairly and squarely in the face, a Highlander and a gentleman.

Grant, a-Grant!

Stand fast, Craigellachie!

. . . . . .

As I was saying, the gam of Labêk village lay, in handcuffs, in the Quarter Guard of Labêk stockade. He had known of it for two days, and had said nothing.

And even now we could get nothing definite out of him. The sahib had been killed. When? *Ki-jané*. Where? *Ki-jané*. By WHOM, damn you? *Ki-jané;* somewhere up north, not us. How far? Who did it? . . . I am afraid we lost our tempers. . . .

Rotten thing to do, because it set loose just that very electricity which it was all-important to suppress. The men caught it from us, and for an angry half-hour there was pandemonium.

Crooke dictated the bare information and crisp orders, copied to half a dozen copies, and sent off

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by runners, east and west, to the other stockades; and a duplicate to Pardon-Howe saying what he was doing. The movable column from each stockade, ever kept in fire-brigade readiness; a driving, sweeping, converging movement from all sides, northwards. Search everywhere; go far, go fast; search every village, every yard of jungle; put to the keenest question every soul found; burn nothing; kill nobody; but search for, and find quickly, the village and the men who killed Grant Sahib.

In twenty minutes the Labêk column was off. We passed through the village; deserted; every soul had fled to the jungle, and everything living and movable with them, save only the Rhode Island Red, safely fenced in, as we found in several other places, against the mischief he might do. (Lord, what would they have done with the patent reversible Frizzles if they had had them!) The desertion was a bad look-out for the future; where were we to get people to question?

By afternoon every movable column was out, and on a hundred mile front such a search went forward as the jungle had never known. Each column broke up into squads, and each squad fanned out on its broadest practicable front. Up hill, down dale, through every thicket and tangle we searched and ferreted, white man and Gurkha; all silent, grim, and intensely set on finding anything, anybody, who could be made to give up the secret of Grant's end. Paths were negligible, except that they led to villages; and every village, as we came to it, lay empty and deserted as a last year's bird's nest.

At nightfall we halted and bivouacked on an irregular predetermined front. No need for concealment; we had the gloves off to them now;

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but the grim silence persisted, and all went about their jobs in soft footfall and whispers. I pity any jungli, had he had the temerity to attack one of those groups just then; he would have been torn to shreds.

Next morning before daylight, off again. It is easy to describe jungle as dense, as gloomy, rain-soaked, all but impassable; but until our language is enriched with verbs and adjectives still to come, it will be impossible to describe the frank solidity of that tangled mass. The Gurks melted through it, silently, as only born jungle-men can, and the white officers followed strenuously in their trail; led, not leading. It was inevitable that patches and bolt-holes should be left, where every square yard of tangle was cover for a grown man; and yet, as near as might humanly be, we sorted that jungle as with a comb, and kept on sorting it. The very sambhar and barking-deer fled before us, as before a line of beaters.

We climbed, we scrambled, we wedged our way through, over and under countless obstacles; self-contained in all necessaries; silent, and growing more grim and more determined as, day by day, we drove northward, and, night by night, we bivouacked and sent back word of our unsuccess.

And as the Labêk column searched, so did the columns from Mu Plos, 'Srosheng, Amili, and a dozen others, all on the one same broad front, driving ever northward. Silent, sodden, leech-bitten, and with a growing vindictiveness filling us all. . . .

Where the junglis went to, I know not. They must have fled northwards by families, by droves, and by tribes. For just once, the Fear of God stalked gaunt and grim through their sodden

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wilderness, and, hushed and hurrying, the naked villains forbore to chatter and slunk away before it.

VII.

Pardon-Howe sat at River Headquarters, deliberately refusing to butt in. He trusted us all, and, at best, could only have been one more searcher.

He reported, briefly enough, the finality of Grant's loss, and the steps taken to find his slayers. Thereafter, silence; not to be broken by the indescribable sequel to which he was treated, on reams of paper, by the Author of All The Mischief. I think Barron realised that the situation was too big for him, and he had—thank God!—the sense to keep away.

In silence, day by day, we worked northward.

. . . . . .

Pardon-Howe found the messengers arriving too slowly. He packed a rucksack and stalked after us, unescorted; his great tall bulk swung out up the path as he pushed the miles behind him. He had grown grimmer than ever in these days; more silent, were that possible.

Five miles out he turned a corner and ran into Toyo, Gam of 'Srosheng, the old and valued colleague of the Kitai-hunt. Toyo rose from the path, his grotesque little face broken up into a grin of a thousand wrinkles at the sight of the Bor Shap, who was more than his gods to him.

"Give ye good hap, Gam," grinned Pardon-Howe.

The gam reached out, patted the great knees and boots, and sank down again.

Long silence.

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"It's all right, Shap; they're still here."

"Here? Who d'you mean?"

"Why, Bomlaw and Lapok, the men who killed Grum Sahib. I thought you knew. Haven't you come for them? And where are your soldiers?"

"WHO? Say it again, man!"

"Bom-law-and-La-pok," slowly and staccato, to the tense face towering over him; and then, with a rush, as he realised the brick he had thrown, "the two who killed Grum Sahib at Mu Fereang. They're getting a canoe out at the *ghat* over there, below Pillung!"

The great square jaw set like a rat-trap. The thin lips were a straight slit across the wide and bony face. He jabbed his khudstick into the ground and slipped off his rucksack straps.

"Where are you off to, Bor Shap?"

"Going to fetch 'em," he muttered.

"Watch it, Shap; there are two of them; fine big men, and armed. Better wait till we can get some Gurkhas"—he spoke to Pardon-Howe's back view, as he found himself following, and not an answer did he get. "Anyhow, I'm coming, too." He slung his dao handy, and ran alongside with pace quickened by the merry prospect of a scrap. Pardon-Howe turned on him and pointed to the path. "Stay you here, Gam; watch my things for me," and sprang lightly into the jungle.

Toyo subsided in his tracks. There was no gainsaying that grim voice. His heart sank like a dropped stone as he listened to the last sounds of the great bulk pushing through the jungle. "Ai-e-e-ee. The Bor Shap. And he unarmed. He's gone to fetch 'em." With eyes glued on where he had last seen his deity, he squatted beside the cast rucksack, gazing and gazing, and listening,

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like a spaniel dog. His scraggy little figure seemed to shrink smaller yet; his chin drooped to his bony knees; two tears very slowly welled up in the little slant eyes, and rolled suddenly down the grimy, furrowed face. He reached for his snuff-mull.

How long he sat there he does not know. He woke to a sound of crashing and bumping; and, through the screen of the jungle edge, emerged a strange trio. Bomlaw and Lapok, helmetless, daoless, and dishevelled, their bullet heads craning forward and their piggy eyes goggling, panting for breath. They came in jerks and snatches, stumbling; for, big as they were, between them towered Pardon-Howe, an immense hairy paw gripping each by the nape of the neck, and the tense muscles standing out on his powerful fore-arms like ship's cable. His clothes, from right armpit to knee, were a sloppy mess of blood.

He impelled them along by jerks; he swung them on to the path, and in complete silence he marched them back the five miles to Headquarters. The iron grip never relaxed, the slow long stride never slackened; no, not when he, sore wounded though he was, had almost to hold up on their feet his two exhausted and panting prisoners; clenched in that vice, they tottered along, all stiltily and a-grog, as it might be sick hens.

Toyo, with the rucksack, trotted along behind, crooning a song in happy little minor quavers.

. . . . . .

Now Pardon-Howe, Political Officer of the Jungle Tracts and Plenipotentiary in the Areas North of the River, held the high, the low, and the middle Justice. He held—and very rightly held—the power of life and death throughout his province. He exercised it with the unhurried judgment

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and calm sense of fairness which was, and ever will be, head and shoulders above Codified Law. So that when we, recalled at length by runners, arrived at Headquarters, it was to find Bomlaw and Lapok squatting behind bars in the Quarter Guard, very stiff in the neck, refusing all food, and looking an impending death full in the face.

The trial was full and formal, but simplified by the frank and obvious truthfulness of the two scoundrels. They gave the history of it all, and their reasons, and how, and why, and where they did it. Throughout the proceedings, the non-moral jungli mentality was apparent in that they viewed their fate more as punishment for their hardihood in slicing a hole in the great, though interfering, Bor Shap, than as retribution for killing Grant. We could *not* get them to see that they had done anything wrong in murdering him. "Yes, we did it. The villagers brought the shap to the Rami tree and left him. We stood him up before the tree. Lapok came behind the shap and cut downwards, once; and his dao sank deep into the shap's brains. And then we cut him into pieces the size of raindrops."

Ab-solutely impenitent.

. . . . . .

Next day Pardon-Howe, with seven stitches in his ribs and swathed in uncomfortably hot bandages, sent word abroad. And it was thus and so. And presently the fifteen principal gams of the Province assembled, in fear and trembling, at Headquarters. To these, and to none other, he entrusted Bomlaw and Lapok, nor would he have one of us, or a single Gurkha, of the party. With these he stalked northwards, himself well ahead and walking alone; and though every step must have pulled on the stitches most confoundedly,

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he walked with a swing and a lilt, his hat in his hand, and the jungle winds playing round his great bald head.

A week they went thus, and not a fearful gam of the party but hedged in the two prisoners and pressed close on them, lest they should make a bolt for it. A week through the jungle, climbing and descending; through villages where the owners were beginning to dribble back, and gazed at the fearsome cortège in awed silence; up and up, into the unmapped beyond.

On the evening of the seventh day they reached the Rami tree by Mu Fereang village; and there, to the big overhanging bough which had shaded Grant's last moments, Pardon-Howe well and truly hanged Bomlaw and Lapok, the fifteen gams tallying on to the cane ropes.

They made all fast, coiled up the slack neatly, and left them there.

VIII.

His Excellency James Pascoe, sprawling in a long chair on the lawn of a Norfolk vicarage, was summoned by Ultimate Authority from half-way through his leave to return and take charge again.

In half an hour from getting the coded cable he took train and he took ship; he may have taken a suitcase; he certainly took no more. The single word "Coming" preceded him.

To meet him at Aden wrote Pardon-Howe, sitting rather stiff and the stitches pulling. It told him all. ". . . of course he thinks it's all my fault; *and* he's told me he thinks I've been both lacking in energy and disloyal. The file is a big one, but you can read it when you get here. I keep it in the safe in my bedroom. We call it 'Towser.' It bites."

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VI.

THE SILVER HAND OF ALEXANDER.

I.

THE golden road to Samarkand. . . .

Khiva, Bokhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Kashgar, Lanchow—rough uncut jewels strung on that long, thin, golden thread which drew the wealth of India and the silks and porcelain of far-off Cathay to Europe, from times remotely B.C. till the day when Vasco da Gama sailed round Africa and opened the sea-route to the East. Each package packed small, to sling on a camel, and each indescribably valuable. No bulk. Months on long months of careful travelling and handling, and then the markets of Byzantium and the West. The overland route of Serindia.

The cities strung along that route waxed fat and golden; by the trade in which they shared; by the transport which they supplied, the lean beasts bought cheaply from the caravans, the beasts fat from the lush grazing of the oases supplied in their place; medicaments for trail-worn man and beast; and the vast army of cooks, vintners, and panders who ministered to men fresh from the desert, and who give even modern Bokhara a name all its own; a reputation which, in ancient times, must have made even the Cities of the Plain look to their laurels.

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Nobody knows how the safeguarding of that route was managed. It is a marvel not that the trade was as constant as it was valuable, but that the caravans ever got through in safety. For, from the Caspian to the point where the last Chinese outposts clung to the extension of the Great Wall, the whole route lay past the lands of the Mongol Tartars.

Now the first record there is of the Tartars is from Alexander the Great. He, of Macedon, inherited Philip's ambition for a hegemony of the Greek peoples, and a counter-attack on the hereditary enemy, Persia. He crossed the Hellespont, and in three historic battles and a long advance lasting four years, smashed Darius, and, with him, Nineveh, Babylon, and the whole Empire of Persia.

He strode over the ruins of Persia into the north-east. Herát, the gateway-fortress of the eastern valleys, he took in his stride. Crossing the Hindu Kush, he made one fat mouthful of Samarkand, Bokhara, and their deadweight of riches. Beyond them lay the desert, and the incalculable fluid tribes of stunted warriors which peopled it. He crossed the Jaxartes, and launched out into the wilderness. The historians say little of what happened; his own chroniclers are silent, and the whole episode is very obscure, but presently he returned, licking his wounds. Pensive.

Whatever it was that happened was shortly forgotten in his matchless conquest of the obstacles which lay between him and the plains of India. But it takes little imagination to see the Macedonian phalanx lumbering slowly through the sand, stung and exasperated by clouds of mounted archers who appeared and disappeared at will, and whose very real numbers must have seemed

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multiplied tenfold by their ubiquity. Undoubtedly they were too much for him. They chased him out of their country, hardly knowing, and little caring, who it was that they were chasing.

Thereafter, silence.

Though this vast people lay like a stormcloud on the horizons of civilisation, it was only in sections that there arose and streamed over the world Attila and his Huns, who swept Europe; the hordes of Jenghiz Khan, who swamped both China and Russia simultaneously; Ogdai, the worst of the lot, whose whirlwind path was one long orgy of senseless slaughter; Mangu; Kublai Khan, he of the stately pleasure dome; Timur Leng of the distorted leg, whose crooked limb seems to have twisted his mind into strange shapes. Never at any one time was the nation united as one, or on the move together. The Lord be praised. For one may picture such a mounted horde, stretching from horizon to horizon, innumerable; brown; silent and hurrying along at a steady six miles an hour; rustling, like a carpet of bees; irresistible; terrifying and merciless.

No, they never got on the move together; and, again, the Lord be praised; for, had it been otherwise, you and I (had we, indeed, ever been born) should now be short of stature, massive of limb and slant of eye, our skin dingy in spite of many baths. For the Tartars would have swamped the earth.

The danger is past, nor can it ever come again. Wars are now a matter of machinery, of economics and complicated organisation. Wars are won in the air, under the sea, in chemists' shops, any way but by floods of irresistible humanity, however grim and ruthless. Picture such a horde;

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picture yourself suddenly viewing it across the plain; "lummy, what a gift!"—and reach for the machine-gun.

In the five hundred years from 1360 to 1860 there is no doubt that the thing was both possible and terrible.

I say 1360, because in that year the first Ming Emperor of China had managed to drive the Tartar race out of China, and to roll its eastern section back, for good, on to its centre, thereby consolidating the nation. Furthermore, by then a certain dawning national consciousness had begun to overspread the Turanian peoples. The splendours of the countries conquered in raid and invasion had not been without their effect, and the Tartars had begun to be wealthy. Light come, light go, as it might be with any pirates, by land or by sea, some of it stuck; and the consolidation of the race began to take shape through its fixed possessions.

Had there been one man, one genius, to inspire the tribes, the movement might have gone more quickly, and with it the danger to the world would have grown. There might have been a widespread prophecy of the reincarnation of Jenghiz Khan and his Golden Horde. The movement might have hinged round some great city saved from the wreck. Luckily, the idea fell into the hands of the Sháman wizards, they who practised the black magic and the devil-propitiation which formed the Tartar religion. But the Shámans, as sombre and obscure as the blind and unimaginative race itself, failed to produce an ideal which would breathe life into the movement.

Now Shámanism is a dark thing: an introspective wizardry devoid of emotion or con-

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structive appeal. It deals largely in mesmerism and the black arts, in signs and talismans, and in the multiplicity and universality of devildom, needing propitiation by the wizard. The talisman idea looms largely in it; and all that the Shâman wizards could produce as an ideal by which to breathe life into the racial solidarity which they sought to foster was a vague talk of a Sign to come. With this idea they barely kept alive the conception, which made little headway through the centuries. Had it ever blazed forth, certainly in the later period, it would have become a flaming anxiety to Mongolia's two near neighbours, Russia and India, and after them to the whole world.

The Turks, that race akin to the Tartars, seem to have known of it in the sixteenth century, and even to have tried to foster it; but they worked along the narrow lines of Islam and got the thing confused with the notion of a Holy War, thereby missing the whole point. In 1916 the Germans, irritated by the stagnation of their failing efforts, turned this way and that, and bit like a rabid dog at anything that offered. The Boche had a fixed policy of missing no chances, however small; and some one in the German War Office unearthed Pan-Turanianism from the files, and set the movement working once more. That stormy petrel, Enver Pasha, was entrusted with the belated business of getting it going again. Its ramifications were many, its potentialities vast. Let those who remember 'Dunsterforce' on the Caspian and the miseries of the East Persian Cordon speak of what it cost us in lives and money. Enver lived long enough to see the whole thing collapse before he died in a messy border-scrap in the midst of the Provinces which

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should have been the king-pin of the whole movement.

It died with him. *Dieu merci.* It was a mighty danger.

II.

There is no doubt that the Pan-Turanian movement was slowly gaining ground up to 1800. In fragments, and at long intervals, it penetrated to the slow brain of John Company, not by its specific name, but as a vague incentive, a restlessness defying location and analysis, a storm-cloud below the horizon with an intermittent flicker of reflected lightning; intangible, but full of menace.

So in 1832 the Company sent Lieutenant Alexander Burnes off into the blue, with a vague mission to go as far as he could into Turkestan and to find out anything he could about anything which might strike him as interesting. He got to Bokhara by devious ways and in disguise, the first white man to get there from India. He did some wonderfully useful work, and seems to have struck, as a side-issue, this Pan-Turanianism, though under the guise of what he thought was a *jihád* or religious uprising. Being a Scot, and thorough, he nosed along this trail, and came across a persistently recurring detail concerning a Talisman with which the movement was unaccountably commingled. This was, by hearsay, a hand—a silver hand—variously described as the Dást, or Dást-i-Sikándar, 'Alexander's Hand'; and lay in the citadel of Herát Fort, on the Hari Rud.

Now the fortress and town of Herát was one of a trio of cities (Bokhara and Samarkand being

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the others) which Alexander, in B.C. 328 on his way from conquered Persia to his impending conquests in India, subjugated and compacted into the province of Bactria. The Greek colonies were firmly established there for two hundred years, till the Tartars made an end of them; and during that time the arts and culture of Greece held full grip on the land. Alexander's was a name with which to conjure, and persists as an influence to this day in all parts of Upper India. The magic of his name kept alive and inviolate the numerous military settlements which marked his onward path, and which, after his death, persisted as islands in the midst of the sea of a hostile population for centuries. Judged by the sheer geographical reach of his personality, the man must have been a marvel.

Herát, as valueless in loot as Bokhara and Samarkand were valuable, is one of those strategic points to be found up and down the world, with a history of mixed fighting running back into the dim beginnings of all warfare, and which will still be nursing its latest wounds when Gabriel blows the Last Trump. Alexander's name overlies it still, though it has suffered siege, storm, and destructions innumerable since his day; and traces of the Greek occupation in pottery, coins, and carved stone are constantly being excavated. So that when Alexander Burnes told his tale of the Dást-i-Sikándar of Herát and stated his belief that round it hung some occult significance of great political value to his masters, the masters smiled; admitting, indeed, its probable existence in a land full of Alexandrine relics, but refusing to recommend it as a serious subject to their Foreign Department; and when, six years later, John Company sent troops to Herát to help to

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stave off a Persian invasion, and those troops had the run of Herát for over a year, the matter was not even mentioned to their commander as a subject to be reported on (if, indeed, it existed at all), and he came away without having heard of it.

But next year, in 1839, one of that venturesome band of Indian native explorers and secret service agents who are perpetually roaming the outer marches of our Indian Empire, and who, even in those days, were known in our Foreign Department at Simla by initials or numbers lest long-armed vengeance should pursue them, settled for a while in Herát, where he got the job of body-servant to the Afghan commander of the Fort garrison. His report, as recorded on his return a year later, is a mass of important detail, every line of which bears witness not only to his persistent enterprise but also to a memory unsurpassed since Marco Polo; since, as was customary, he kept no written notes. But one thing which he risked his life to bring away was a clear pen-and-ink drawing of the Dást-i-Sikándar and the sarcophagus-shaped stone box, some twenty-four inches by twelve, which enclosed it.

Both sketches and report are on the files; and though for many years they have ceased to be more than interesting curiosities, the contemporary scribbled marginal notes by the highest in the land seem to show that for some forty years they were treated with a respect due only to dynamite or nitro-glycerine.

The description, both of the thing itself and of its casket, is curious. The hand is about twice life-size. It is massive, and of pure silver. The modelling, even down to the network of lines on the palm, is perfect. The veins on the back

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are anatomically correct; and where the clean sweep of the wrist-bones would join the arm, the work finishes in a raised key-pattern border of unmistakable Greek design. The man who sat for the model must have been one of strong character, to judge by the masterful outlines. The whole thing is rather impressive.

Its sarcophagus-shaped casket is in every way a curiosity. It is of the black schist, hard to carve and very lasting, from which many of the Græco-Indian carvings have been wrought. The sides are plain, but the top is carved in high relief. Within, again, a Greek key-pattern border are two figures; on the left a winged female figure—a Niké, maybe—beautifully draped, carrying the conventional palm-frond and raised left hand; on the right a peculiar thing. Its head is stately and impressive, with flowing hair and beard and strongly intellectual features, quite good enough to be a Zeus; good shoulders and arms, bare. But where a fine torso would be expected, or at least flowing draperies, are a sagging chest and a bulging abdomen, which might have been copied from some good-humoured Chinese joss. Not only that, but the folds of fat overflow the edge of a *dhoti*, the universal loin-cloth trousers of India to this day, sordid and unhandsome. Nor is this enough; for the sculptor, instead of letting the figure stand erect, has shown it squatting—what we call 'baitho'ing' in India,—an attitude which serves, if the body be gross, to bring out its very worst curves.

The whole thing is grotesque. It is impossible to imagine that the Alexandrine craftsman of Bactria, that home of virile impulses, could have copied it from life. And yet there it is. Cover the figure on the right, and the casket is a stately

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bit of artistry. Cover the left figure and expose the right, and the work is saved from a monstrous repulsiveness only by the craftsman's obvious skill. A piece of archæological skylarking. I cannot to this day imagine what it means.

At ground-level, between the two figures, are indications of the sockets which once held a piece of metal-work, now vanished. Careful inspection of marks on the stone gives the impression that the lost piece was a silver miniature of the Hand inside; but what Niké and Zeus-*cum*-Dives were meant to be doing with it is beyond my comprehension.

A ragged chip off the left-hand bottom corner exposes the texture of the stone.

But, to resume.

In the following year a second initialled agent was working in the same district. He had seen the first report, and thought it worth the risk to push the matter farther. The service into which he managed to introduce himself with the Fort governor was, it is to be feared, much less reputable than that of his forerunner, but was more comprehensive and confidential. He came back some time later, half-dead from the nearly successful attempt by one of the governor's women to poison him. He told a vague story of abstracted keys and subterranean ferretings. But there was no vagueness about his confirmation of the Dást, which he had handled on three different occasions. He added one detail which had escaped his predecessor and did not come out in the sketch, and that was that the hollowness of the wrist which might have been mistaken for the casting was in reality a shaped socket made to fit a pole or lance-shaft. Might it have been used to crown a banner, a flagstaff? It might.

The reinforcing information which he added

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was definite, and commanded attention. His duties having lain in a certain section of the bazaar, he had kept his ears open. Now the information to be obtained from that part of Eastern womanhood which is accessible is, in direct contrast with its Western counterpart, both reliable and important. It took, let us call him, X.Y.Z. some six months to put together, check, and cross-check the fact that the cities of Turkestan, the centres of the virile population of Central Asia, and the innumerable Mongol nomads behind them, were pervaded with a single idea and purpose, and, beneath an inscrutable exterior, were waiting—tense as a bow-string. The whisper which ran up and down India later, in the spring of 1857, would have been feeble compared with this stimulus which pulsed through the width and breadth of a continent. The Tartars were waiting for a Sign. What sign? Nobody knew. Who should bring it? A shrug of the shoulders, and palms stretched outwards. But insistently, when vagueness reached its haziest mystery, would recur the whisper of "Sikándar. The Dást-i-Sikándar!" Thereafter, silence.

In between these long silences the least imaginative could picture to himself the countless nomad hordes of Mongolia; the great mass of horsemen, from horizon to horizon; brown; a swarm of bees. The distant whisper of countless unshod hoofs on the plains; noiseless and voiceless men; and the hoofs rustling, rustling . . .

Whither? To what end? Nobody knew. But the imagination saw men and beasts dead and contorted, towns in smoking ruin, and blank desolation in the wake of those moving myriads.

Then the information shut down. Agent after agent was sent to verify—to amplify—to fill

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the gaps in a mystery which by now was treated with hushed alarm, and was entrusted to nobody but the highest half-dozen in the land. Of the agents only one came back, and he with the purple wounds of recent lacerating tortures so thickly on him that he died before he could fully describe his failure.

The matter could not rest there. Native agents had failed; but, a couple of years later, two white men, Captains Stoddart and Connolly, were despatched, nominally on a political mission to Nasr Ullah, the Khan of Bokhara, actually to move *viâ* Herát and to find out all they could of the Dást and the mystery which surrounded it. They disappeared over the frontier.

Months later they found means to send back a report; the Dást, stone-casing and all, *had disappeared.*

The mystery prophecies of an impending Sign had given place to an irritated helplessness, where each man in a whisper accused the other, "Was it thou, brother?"; where the innocent were grabbed up out of the purlieus of the bazaar and twisted to death in the Citadel to extract a non-existent secret; and where a fevered and furious search went forward from day to day behind an inscrutable veil of silence.

Stoddart's report was quite definite. The Dást had been stolen, spirited away; and the Governor of the Citadel, the only man who could have thrown any light on it, was dead. Of a fever? Possibly, of a fever.

Stoddart and Connolly went forward. A while after, they reported to India their arrival at a village on the outskirts of Bokhara, and their intention of entering the city and waiting on

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the Khan next day. Then, like a wall, silence shut down on them also, and not a message nor a word did they send again.

What happened to them is well known. The whole pitiful story was pieced together from native reports. In that year, 1842, the prestige of John Company's servants was already high enough to give them safety even in far-away Bokhara. So it must have been something very urgent which prompted Nasr Ullah, the Khan, to do these two staunch soldiers to death in the ghastly way of which we know. In a corner of the market-place gaped a well-like pit some fifteen feet deep. This opened out at the bottom into a cave-like chamber, with no opening but the circle of sky at the pit-mouth; no other air nor light; and the whole floor of that charnel-house lay feet deep in the rotting remains of malefactors and others, done to death at the place of public execution in the market-place and their bodies flung down the pit.

In this indescribable dungeon they were kept, a pittance of foul water and *chupattis* lowered to them daily, not for days or weeks but for months. At the end of that time they were hauled up. Blanched and scraggy, with matted hair and beards, their clothing all but rotted off them, they were dragged to the Black Stone. Five minutes later their lifeless bodies were pitched back into the pit whence they had emerged.

It is a living and lasting sorrow that no vengeance was ever exacted from their slayer. The story of their end, as published for the softening of the blow to their home-folk, contained something more than a suggestion that the Khan had offered them their lives if they would renounce Christianity, and that they steadfastly refused. But

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Nasr Ullah was no fanatic to let his religion overcome prudence in his treatment of the Sirkár's white servants; nor is there any record of his being egged on to it by the numerous *mullahs* of that abode of Mussulman learning. Far more probable, to my mind, is the theory that hardly had they entered the presence of the Khan than he rose in his seat and accused them of stealing from the Citadel of Herát, Allah knew by what means, the Dást-i-Sikándar; and they, poor fellows, indignantly denying it, and to the last unable to save themselves by restoring to him an object on which they had never set eyes, were flung into the pit.

The greater credence attaches to this version from the fact that on the first night of their arrival near the city their papers were rifled, and, with them, the confidential instructions bearing on the main object of their journey disappeared as well. But it is all of a piece with the mystery which obstinately shrouded everything connected with the talisman that, though the native reports were painfully precise in the details of all that was done to the two officers, no shadow of motive for the Khan's vindictive cruelty was ever suggested.

One thing, however, is certain. From that time onwards the Dást ceased to trouble. Search high, search low; by ways effective and—in any other cause—questionable; through white man, through brown man, the hunt went forward. The search did not stop, even while India writhed in the horrors of 1857. Gradually it died down. The thing had clean vanished.

Now I am not suggesting for a moment that hard-headed men at the helm believed that a

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cataclysm in Central Asia hung of necessity on the presence or absence of the thing which had disappeared. But the implications of what such an upheaval would mean were such that anything intimately connected with it simply had to be taken seriously. And, apart from the persistent association of the talisman with the well-grounded rumours of a Pan-Turanian outburst, those versed in the ways of the East knew well how often a seemingly trivial object, if wrapped about with sufficient mystery and suggestion, could be made to sway immeasurable human forces. The feeling of relief was therefore deep when it became clear that a dangerous movement had lost its increasing momentum, and was apparently wandering in confused circles because the mystical portion of it had somehow been spirited away. Whether *post hoc* or *propter hoc*, there is no doubt that from 1840 onwards Pan-Turanianism was a weakening force. To the Russ, of course, political reasons prevented our confiding either our information or our fears, and the same reasons debarred us from enlisting his help in a combined movement to scotch the peril. So that it was by the happiest coincidence that he, of his own volition, got on the move. Completely ignorant of anything approaching a Pan-Turanian danger, and driven only by expansionist motives, he had by 1868 penetrated to Tashkent and Turkestan, thereby slicing into two clean halves the nations which would have formed the Tartar Confederacy. The countless nomad Mongols to the eastward were separated from the resources of Samarkand and Bokhara to the westward, and from the brains which informed them. With mind divorced from matter, Pan-Turanianism died for good and all.

The 'Russian Menace' took its place. But

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to those who could follow step by step all that had gone before, the 'menace' was a flip of the fingers and a shooting out of the lip compared with the vastness of the danger which had vanished.

III.

Osborne House, in the Isle of Wight, has, since 1904, been a convalescent home for officers of both—or all three—Services. In days before the war, cases of battle-damage were in the minority; for, prosaic though it be, more than half the patients were suffering from either damaged knees (the knee being an infernally tricky joint) or from appendices present or recently absent in the wave of appendicomania which swept the land in the decade before the war. The large majority were officers on the active list; but, very occasionally, a veteran from a past generation would drift in to repair the ravages of *anno domini* and to renew a long-past youth in the company of those who, in some cases, might well have been his grandsons.

Propped on rug and cushion against the bole of the great cedar on the front lawn, one of these veterans, one long summer evening, supplied me with a bit of unrecorded history which, to my lasting surprise, provided the sequel to what I have tried to record above.

"You lads look very trim?" he said. "Expect you smile a bit at this old jacket of mine"—he always wore a wadded black smoking-jacket for dinner. "Old bones, you know; easier than mess-kit. You don't bother much with mess-kit, now you're down here? All the old customs seem to be going somehow, and it's all for loose

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comfort and that sort of thing, isn't it? I wonder how you would have liked to go fighting in tight blue serge, with a white helmet and belt and a sword dangling, as we did in Afghanistan in 1879? We did; anyhow, we of the cavalry and British infantry who went up first. Blue-serge jackets, tight breeches, and a white pot helmet, come sun or snow; and if you wore a Sam Browne belt it was either that you were a General or on the Staff. It was 'side' for any one else to be seen in one, and you got told off about it. The later infantry took a better tip from the Native Army when they came up in cotton khaki; but even then the soldier's khaki was only his white cotton uniform of cantonments sent down to the bazaar to be dyed before the regiment marched, and the result was pretty patchy, I remember. You do things better now. The slung sword was an abomination; you always needed a spare hand to carry it; and what with slung swords and jack-boots, there was little use in dismounting my troopers for fire action, so we mostly stayed on our horses and let the carbines be.

"What were the Afghans like? They were fine men—finer, individually, than our fellows—and they kept you full on the stretch whenever you took them on. I never saw one of them in a fight but meant it heart and soul. Great tall devils, as hard as nails and very strong; faces like hawks; and hairy. They fought always to come to hand grips—their foot soldiers, I mean. Their cavalry never showed up much, except once, on the Ahmed Khel day; but their foot people fought well, in line. They fought with long *tulwárs*, which they kept as sharp as razors, always using the cutting edge, and a round target shield of hide. Our long Martini and bayonet had only

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an inch or two the better reach of an Afghan stretching himself to a full cut. They stood up to us cavalry, too, and weren't a bit reluctant about it, giving as good as they took. They had firearms, of course, mostly matchlock *jezails* as tall as themselves, with which they used to snipe from the hills; but only a sprinkling of *jezails* in their battle lines. The *jezailchis* were generally the older men.

"There was only one thing to be done with their attack when they came on: fire as far off and as fast as the men's musketry training would allow. If that failed to keep them off, the supporting lines generally had to come up to restore matters when the front began to bulge inwards. That was where good drill discipline came in—without that we should have been broken many a time.

"Those were the days when our eight-company infantry battalions fought in line, five companies in front and the other three in support. Our brigade fighting front must have stretched a good mile, by a quarter of a mile deep, the batteries in the intervals and we cavalry handy in rear and to a flank as opportunity served and ground demanded. The infantry used volleys, by companies; none of your independent firing, which was looked on as bad discipline. I remember the British used to look down on the Native Infantry quite a lot for this reason—the Gurkhas particularly being prone to individual shooting, being angry little devils in a fight, and each liking to see his man fall. But the Sikhs were less easily roused, and held to the British pattern. You should have seen them at Ahmed Khel when the rest of the line was sagging about here and there and things getting mixed. There they

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stood like a wall, and took the full force of the Ghilzai charges for an hour. I went over the ground afterwards and saw the line of empty brass Snider cases where the Sikhs had stood. You could have driven a cart down the line, and the cases would all have lain between the two wheel tracks"—and the old chap drew, with his walking-stick, two parallel lines on the turf, and paused, staring at them pensively.

"Did the Afghans fight fair? On the whole, yes. Of course, if you were caught alone, strolling out of camp or without an escort, they got you. Also it was just as well not to be left on the ground, wounded, after a fight. If you left any wounded out they used to cut them up, slowly," and he went into details.

"Yes, they were fine fighters. The Ghilzais and Duránis were the best of them, and they must have put a hundred thousand into the field from first to last.

"We went up with the first column after the Ali Masjid fight, straight through the Khyber Pass, and on to the plains beyond Dakka, travelling mainly by night, as it was furnace heat by day in those narrow rocky gorges.

"We cavalry had little but scouting to do to begin with, and we saved our horses all we could. It was a sad, bad land for horses, especially for our heavy English beasts and Waler remounts. I had a big heavy cob with a butt-end on him like a card-table. We used to call him the Cyclops; but he was well bred, and as nimble as a cat on bad ground for all the sixteen stone I rode in full marching order.

"My squadron commander was Harris, a fine soldier. He was also a keen archæologist, having spent a couple of years as attaché in some kind of

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research department of the Foreign Office at Simla, where, on the Q.T., they show you all kinds of unexpected things. He was perpetually coughing up odd bits of queer information about the land we were going through, and, I remember, he made the old Khyber live like a museum as we passed along it. Alexander, and what not. A rarity for us in those days, a brainy soldier. But a jolly good man in a fight, all the same.

"Well, as I say, we were mostly employed in scouting. The plains were wide: to look at them you would think that they could not conceal a mouse. But they were seamed with nullahs: nothing very deep, but enough to conceal a thousand men here and there, and all wanted searching. We couldn't afford a close-quarter rush on the solid slow-moving formations in which brigades moved in those days. It was not till afterwards, on the Kandahar march, that Roberts taught us how to move on a broad front in a loose square —very flexible. We found little to keep us busy. The occasional old shepherd was probably a spy, but showed no fight even when we had to polish off the vicious great sheep-dogs who would go for a man mounted as readily as for one on foot.

"Did we have a fight?

"We did.

"It was this way. We'd been in the country round about Jalálabad for a fortnight, the Afghan armies from the Khyber apparently out of the picture for good, when we got word that a large force was massing to the westward to come down on us. Next morning there they were, a great dark mass out on the plain, with splashes of colour where their standards showed up. No need of scouting to find them. It was the real thing at last.

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"Out came our infantry and guns, and we formed up on the plain. We of the cavalry were in reserve, in rear of the left, where the job looked as if it would be hardest. Then we started slowly across the plain towards them, the guns stopping now and then to play at long-bowls. This set the Afghans moving towards us; and then we realised that the great yellow flat wasn't the billiard table it looked. It rose and fell in long flat billows, so that at one time the two forces were in full view, and five minutes later the plain in front of us looked empty. The long waves would hide an army in line, and there was a criss-cross of deep nullahs to our left front. Even I, young and newly joined, could see that it would have been as well to have had a few scouts out ahead. Anyhow, it was no business of mine, and our people went ahead steadily, raising a lot of dust but keeping a good line.

"It seemed no time before the infantry got to close grips with large bodies of Afghans, who were coming down on the attacking front in clumps and by rushes, each charge carrying a banner. Our people were holding their fire till close quarters —very foolish; but all was for discipline and a stout straight line in those days. I heard a Captain sing out to his Company, 'Now then, boys; give 'em a good one. *All* together, now'; and then *p-r-r-rp! cr-r-r-mp!* 'good crisp volleys,' as the Aldershot Generals liked to hear them on a field day on the Fox Hills. Trying, for the infantry. It must have been over trying for some of them. As I looked I saw a subaltern break out of the line, followed by three or four of his men, and go straight for the first group of Afghans. He got the standard-bearer with a beautiful point, and the two went down together as the others

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closed in on them, all hacking and jabbing and a lot of dust. One infantryman broke away and got back to our line, but the rest were flat on the plain as the standard rose again and the group swept forward, to be volleyed into a heap by the Company twenty yards away.

"All down the line these charges kept coming on, and many of them got to grips with our men.

"The firing was pretty general now, and our line steadying to a slow walk, the main body of the Afghans coming down on it like a black thundercloud.

"Then things began to move faster in our area. A galloper came down from the centre, full split, pulled up alongside our Colonel, and gave him a quick message, pointing the while out into the plain to our left front. In a minute we found ourselves trotting out in column to our left, to clear the supporting companies of infantry on that flank. I asked Harris, my squadron commander, what was on. He called the other troop-leaders up, and told us there was a heavy force of Ghilzai swordsmen coming down from the left under the shelter of the nullahs, and that we had been told to break them up as soon as they got out on to the plain and before they could get into the left flank of our infantry attack. I could see nothing. The plain was just as flat and as yellow as ever. Harris couldn't either. But I pulled up till my troop came abreast, and gave the N.C.O.'s the orders. They passed them on to the men, who began to lose touch a little as they peered out over the plain, seeing as much as I could, and that was nothing.

"We had cleared the left flank of the infantry when the Colonel sang out an order, and I found my troop in the first squadron line, slowed to a

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walk, and nothing in front of us but mile after mile of yellow stony desert, and the mirage jumbling up hills and dust-devils into one mass of dancing scenery on the horizon.

"We moved forward at the trot, and I found we were mounting a long smooth swell of the plain, a long way to an imperceptible crest in the foreground. The Colonel and one of the Majors were riding ahead. Harris called me over to him, and explained that when we saw the Ghilzais we were to go for them, hence our formation. Where were they? *He* didn't know, but they were there somewhere, and if we went on long enough we'd find them, he supposed; and I'd better get back to my troop, because we might be busy any moment. So back to the troop I went, and told them what little I knew; and before I'd finished telling the N.C.O.'s it dawned on me that I was in for my first cavalry charge.

"I think it dawned on us all at the same moment; anyhow, my troop sergeant-major began to see to the dressing, amid some cursing. The Khyber, and very mixed camping, hadn't improved our drill. But the ranks closed up; and at this moment we saw the Punjab cavalry trotting out into line on our left, their half-dozen British officers out in front and the Ressaldars seeing to the squadron-leading. They got their sabres out, and I found my men drawing swords. No order given, but I let it be; and Harris saw it and sang out to 'draw swords.'

"The ranks closed up and we trotted forward up the rise, all going well together and the noise increasing somewhat.

"The Punjabis on our left were the first to spot them. I saw their Colonel throw up his hand and point forward as we approached the

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crest. Almost at the same moment we, too, saw them. We topped the crest, good going underfoot, and no obstacles. The ground fell away gently to our front to a shallow dip four hundred yards away; thence it rose gently in another long wave.

"And there, two-thirds of the way down the far slope, were the Ghilzais.

"There must have been some thousands of them, a line about five hundred yards long and a solid ten deep. They came on in silence, keeping a rough dressing—swordsmen, *jezailchis*, and a few mounted men here and there, all very compact and rather grim. The line looked grey and black with their puttoo and sheepskin coats and a foundation of dirty white moving below, where their rusty cotton pyjamas clothed their legs.

"They came steadily down the slope. They spotted us, and came to a halt. Out flashed their long swords in hundreds, and they stood a moment. Presently they began to move forward again, down to the dip.

"We also halted on the crest. The Colonel called to his trumpeter, and the call rang out; first at a walk, a bit of jostling here and there, immediately checked by the sergeants; and then we were trotting.

"The whole thing, from the trumpet-call till we were into them, couldn't have lasted ninety seconds, and yet I can remember quite vividly a dozen things happening. Harris and I and the other troop-leaders were out in front, in line with the C.O., who had put away his field-glasses and was blowing his nose. The Major rode alongside him. I saw Harris lug out his sword, and I followed suit, and the men clattered along behind. Then a doubt got me: the Ghilzai line ahead

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looked infernally solid, and I wondered whether I hadn't better use a revolver. I put my sword back and pulled out my revolver. It felt very solid and satisfactory, till I remembered that it would be useless after the sixth round, and I was putting it back again when Harris shouted to me to keep my men in hand. I found we had outdistanced the others, and the troop line was beginning to bulge. He and I pulled up a bit and shouted to the men to keep their dressing. Some of them had started cantering, and there was a little crowding. I distinctly remember one man—he must have been getting his knees painfully squashed—hurl out an oath and catch his next file a swipe with the hilt. But they pulled together quick. I tugged out my sword again, ran my hand through the stout leather wrist-strap, and then things began to happen.

"The Ghilzais, compact and steady, had crossed the dip, and were mounting our slope, their swords twinkling in the sun. We had lessened the distance to a couple of hundred yards, and now we were cantering, all together and serene. I never saw the men going better, even on a ceremonial parade. No shouting, but a good deal of clatter. The Cyclops was waking up and beginning to pull a bit. What's to happen when we get into them? thinks I. And then it flashed across me what our old roughrider sergeant had told me: 'Hold straight, sir; if two men meet, point-on, it isn't stalemate. One of them is sure to drop his point at the last to try and guard, but the one who really means it gets in and gets his man.' Hold straight it was, then; and, anyhow, the point was the only thing against thick sheepskin coats. I shouted it back to the men—point, point, use the point! Confound the noise, would they never hear?

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"No time for pulling back to make them hear. The Cyclops was pulling in earnest now, and going great guns. The pace increased, the din grew; rattle, clatter, and hammer of hoofs. Now the men started shouting—no hooraying but just a sort of hoi! hoi! and mixed shouts and swearing, Harris on my right damning away good and proper and the thing going to one's head like wine.

"The Ghilzais stopped. You could see their faces plainly now. 'Stopped, good lord—they're done for. The line halted, taking a charge. Done for—done for!'

"The din and the dust grew terrific as we thundered down on them, a group of eagle-eyed, black-bearded swordsmen just ahead of me. I saw two of them drop their swords and stoop to pick up chunks of stone; shaken, going back to primitive first principles as men will when they get rattled. An old greybeard upped with his *jezail* and drew a bead on me. Damn him! *Who-o-o-oop*, into them now! I bent low along the Cyclops' neck, sword outstretched as far as I could reach, and pointed for the exposed armpit of the man stooping to the stone.

"WHUMP!—into them.

"Though I felt nothing, I knew the point had got him, for the sword was wrenched out of my grasp as we tore past, the loop only holding it. A big yellow explosion right in my face as the old *jezailchi* pulled the trigger and the Cyclops threw up his head and caught me an almighty clout on the cheek and helmet. I grabbed at the sword-hilt, and got the point forward again. The Cyclops crashed into something and half came down, just as a big Ghilzai smote a tremendous swipe at my exposed back. The blade whistled

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past my ear, missing me by a hair's-breadth. I jabbed at him furiously. The point jarred into his face-bones, and he went down all of a heap. I found myself all mixed up with our people, Sergeant Green, I remember, hammering and slashing away on my left. A big Sikh Ressaldar had found his way into the jumble on my right, and cut down two before a pack of them closed in on him, tugged him from the saddle, and hacked him to bits on the ground. My troop were barging about all over the place, all of them forgetting the point and using the edge all they knew how, and the people on foot were going over like ninepins.

"Then I saw we had them. Their line broke up into groups, and though they were very sticky some of them must have had enough, for they began to run. Then it was yoicks and away after them! Sergeant Green and half a dozen had broken through, and were hunting them down—single troopers and knots of sowárs joining in, each picking a group or a man and clearing them up. There was nothing more happening near me, and I tried to get some of the men together. We had gone about two hundred yards beyond the point where the first crash had happened, and the Ghilzai line was all to bits; but a couple of dozen of them, stout fellows, had formed a clump about fifty yards to our left, round a green and black standard of sorts, facing us, and looking ugly.

"Suddenly Harris emerged from the dog-fight behind. He barged up alongside me, grabbed me by the arm, and pointed to the clump ahead of us. He was trying to say something, his voice all thick and raggy with shouting. '*What?*—can't hear in all this din.' He pointed again and

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shouted in my ear; and then I got it. 'Sikándar. The Dást-i-Sikándar, man. *Look!*' It was the standard he was pointing at, a big green flag with black arabesque characters on it; and at the top of the pole something silvery and glittering, which looked like a large human hand.

"I shouted some men together, to make a line with us and go for them, and they were pulling out in my direction when I saw a duffadár of the native cavalry swing up with ten of his men and go slap into them from behind, the big curved *tulwárs* rising and falling like flails, and the knot of Ghilzais just burst asunder—nothing left of them. The duffadár went for the standard-bearer, who was crouching among the dead. I saw the standard pole raised, crosswise, to guard the owner's head. I saw the raised *tulwár* and the stunning sweep of the blow which shore through pole and arm as the duffadár swept past. One of his men, following at a gallop, stooped low in the saddle and caught up the fallen trophy. He straightened up, and whirled the thing round his head—as a man whirls his lance when he has taken the peg—and '*hai-i-e-e-eee!*' rang out his long, triumphant squeal above the tumult.

"'Lord! they've got it,' gasped Harris.

"The knot of sowárs rode off at a canter to find their Colonel, we after them. It must have looked like a kind of unofficial guard of honour. They found him. He was looking cool and breezy, I remember; I dunno how, but he hadn't the look we all had of having butted head-foremost through a thorn hedge. They pulled up in front of him, forgetting to salute, and the duffadár came forward. He pushed the standard forward, reaching out the silver hand towards the Colonel, who saluted, stretched out, and touched it; hand

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meeting silver hand; touch and remit, as is the way in the East; and '*Shabásh!* Hira Singh,' said he.

"The Sikándar is in their mess now. They have it out on guest nights sometimes. I've seen it there when I've dined with them. It was a queer thing, and I often wish I knew more about it. Old Harris knew; he seemed to recognise it the moment he saw it. But he never told me; poor chap, he was killed that same afternoon.

"I wonder what it was . . ."

I told him. I was still telling him when the Matron came out and swept us off to bed.

IV.

Now comes the queer part of the business. In 1923 I was home on leave, and, as the period terminated, *res angustæ domi* became (as often happens to the furlough man) rather insistent; so that I was impelled to take to a firm which likes these things a small batch of rather unusual war medals collected in India. The firm also buys and sells curious treasures of all sorts; and its manager is the only man I know who, for wide erudition, could equal the owner of Kim's curiosity shop on Simla Mall, and of whose identity many Kipling lovers are aware. Our business done, he asked me to give an opinion on an unusual piece acquired that day from a lady who had recently lost her husband in India, whose goods she had been compelled (again by *res angustæ*) to sort and reduce. He had sold it that afternoon to an American collector, and

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was on the point of packing it. He led me to an inner room, and took a weighty parcel from a safe. Carrying it to a table under a strong electric globe, he undid the wrappings.

"There, now; what do you think of that? It's a fine piece, and quite unique: a bit of real Græco-Indian carving. And genuine. Do you agree?"

I gazed, and could hardly believe my eyes. Line by line, and chip by chip, I went over it, as I had often pondered over the sketch in that inner room in the office at Simla. There was the angel, there the squatting Jove with his Rabelaisian tummy and the folds of his very un-Greek loin-cloth. There, too, was the unmistakable chip off the left-hand lower corner, showing the texture of the black schist whose surface the ages had elsewhere worn to a dirty grey.

Genuine? Here was the very slab which, for well over two thousand years, had covered Alexander's silver hand!

I gazed.

I took off my spectacles and rubbed the bridge of my nose. I almost rubbed my eyes. *Genuine?*

"Undoubtedly genuine," I think I muttered. But my antiquarian must have thought me infernally rude, because, as far as I remember, I walked straight out on to the pavement without saying good-bye to him, and stood there, all of a dither.

Lummy, *what* a small world!

Somebody in a hurry cannoned into me, and I turned into Piccadilly Circus to catch my bus.

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VII.

WEIGHTS, AND SCALES.

A SPRING morning in Northern India. The first of ten days' leave; hard to get, at this the most perfect time of the year, but, by mercy, inserted with difficulty between courses, inspections, manœuvres and what not; and, by an even greater mercy, preceded by that well-known flying start which adds a Saturday and Sunday to make the total twelve.

The flying start has brought us to the banks of one of the lesser known rivers which bring the snow-water of the Himalayas to the plains of the Punjab—and let that much geography suffice. As Kim's Lama sought a river of rest and healing, so may you search for this, where neither rest nor healing lies, but which holds the mighty mahseer; invariably holds him. Search, therefore, unaided; a certain regiment knows it; but, for the rest, this river shall roll on, unadvertised and unspoilt.

In the Indian spring, and for possibly three weeks, you shall have the best of fishing. At this time of year the water has ceased to be gin-clear, and is not yet turbid with the detritus of melting snow from the mountains; it is a good, strong, ginger-beer colour, and in such water a spoon will spin with deadly effect.

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The time, the place, and the thing beloved have therefore miraculously coincided. The tent is up, dinner earned and imminent, and the air has just that nip which makes a thick coat and many blankets things of comfort and anticipation. The local shikari will blow in at daylight. Pass, cook and dinner; all's well.

Before daylight we lie awake, snug in the blankets, and sniffing the wood-smoke which heralds the somewhat smoky morning tea. All round us, in crops and reeds, rings out the gamey challenge of the grey partridge, and that astonishing cat-call of the jungle peacock: *Aaow! eeaow! miauw!* in a dozen different keys and cadences. Just like cats; large and rather querulous cats. Matter for the gun abounds here, and if you will, for the rifle, since that ponderous and ungainly antelope the *nilghai* makes it his home. No trophy is he, though technically antelope; with his clumsy head, high withers, and broadside like a barn-door, nobody would dream of shooting him. Also, he is sacred, being 'blue.'

There is a sort of *non-sequitur* here to those who know not India; but to the Hindu all things blue are sacred. The peacock, for instance, whose flashing azure approximates to the vivid ultramarine of the god Krishna. Some kinds of monkeys, too, are sacred; one imagines, because the south elevation of this particular variety is of a striking blue, especially on a cold morning. Though this scribe once—and once only—in his unregenerate subalternhood passed a grove containing a temple and loosed off a charge of No. 6 at the irresistible target aforesaid; and missed. But the target, much alarmed though quite unharmed, suddenly flashed a vivid red and disappeared.

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The theological question would then arise: if the target in repose be blue, and at a moment of sudden emotion (say, for instance, the whizz of an ounce of No. 6) suddenly glows a pillar-box red, has sacrilege been committed? The casuist might argue that the target is a red one; look at it disappearing; a sunset red. Ah yes, but the target *was* blue; was certainly blue when the gun was lifted and the trigger pulled. It is a nice question in applied dogma. It might be possible to get hold of a comfortable-looking Brahmin one day—one, for preference, without that usual foxy look—who on (and for) sufficient consideration might give a favourable verdict.

There remains the fact that blue things are, in their cærulean nature, sacred to the Hindu, and may not be damaged, even though his notion of 'blue' be wide. The *nilghai*, for instance, is a slate-grey, but is judged blue. So is the peacock, whose blues of many shades would shame the paint-box. So is a grey mare. So, also, is a brindled bulldog of our acquaintance (much respected by the Aryan Brother as a canine speciality of ruling sahibdom, though, for phonetic reasons unfathomable by the Westerner, called a 'guldank') who is no more blue than you or I.

So the *nilghai* goes free, all the freer for the tameness bred of his immunity; and, anyhow, blue or not, we are not out shooting but after mahseer, though we seem to have lost sight of the fact.

An early breakfast; and, as we are collecting the tackle, the shikari and his following turn up. He seems silent and unenthusiastic; but his following of two little dusky nippers—most scantily clothed, as befits the water breed—stand in the background and eye the sahib shyly. Are they

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to be of the party? They are. The little beady eyes light up with a happy twinkle as they crowd in for their share of small-stuff to carry. Their keenness seems to defy the nip of the early morning in their unclad state, and off we go for our half-mile trudge.

Here is the river. Two hundred yards from bank to bank, it is still full of the mighty impulse of its tumbling birth in the Himalayan foothills, whose humpy shoulders rise from the plain ten miles to the north-east. Icy cold from the snows, wreaths of mist rise from it as the early sun strikes it. A fisherman's paradise. Far enough away from civilisation to be unspoilt, it runs in a succession of noisy rapids and long quiet reaches. The banks round these pools, where the river has leisure to deposit its silt, are overgrown with tangled jungle to the water's edge. But the banks of the rapids offer good stance, and here we unpack the tackle: a fourteen-foot Hardy with a stiffish top, for spinning; a Silex, carrying a hundred and fifty yards of fresh line and a similar length of backing, for we know of old the stout-hearted inhabitants of this kind of water. In their honour, ample length must be provided. A stout gut trace, well tested, and a spoon on a bit of stout gimp; a bite means a fight on a morning like this. The outline and weight of the spoon are of the utmost importance; nothing bought in a shop seems to fill the bill, and this particular weapon was constructed by the armourer to a pattern traditional in the regiment. Long may the secret be guarded among those who know its value, for the least departure from it—in these waters at least—spells fruitless labour and a blankness of days.

Now cast well out into the rapid. If we can

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get the spoon to spin, and remain spinning, just where that tumbled water merges into the smooth eddies at the head of the pool, all will be sunshine, cream, and roses. Well out. Whop! The spoon takes it well and truly, and races down the tossing water; the line pays out unchecked, for the least touch will spoil the direction of the spoon, which is heading straight for its intended destination. Check gently as the cast runs out of the rapid into the pool. Will it spin? For a moment, yes. Spins beautifully, just bending our top over the least bit in the world. But the moment passes, the line slackens, the spoon gets in among an undiscoverable under-water dog-fight of currents, and the moment vanishes. Disappointment and puzzledom as the rod loses its life and the line hangs all slack and inert. What on earth . . . ? The line has a sulky life of its own, for it begins to coil slowly back on itself as the strong backwash under the bank brings spoon, trace, and line back, back, almost to our feet.

Reel up and try again. Again and again it happens. Cast where we will, let the line run its clearest free, the spoon spins a moment, sulks, and comes home to roost. An hour is wasted in a maddening solution of angular hydrostatics, till the conviction slowly dawns that only by standing on stilts in the midst of a rapid some ten feet deep, and thence casting direct to the pool, shall we ever get that spoon to spin.

Much head-scratching, while sandwiches disappear. An island in mid-stream. Oh, for an island! No islands. Hah, by our halidom, a boat. What about a boat? M'm. *If* we had a boat, and *if* we could anchor it where the rapid begins, and in mid-stream, and *if* we could play

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a heavy fish from a small boat, and *if*, under all these conditions, the *kishti* or ramshackle Indian tub could be induced to stay above water, a boat might yet be made to impersonate an island. To the shikari, then, a tentative suggestion. A boat? Say now, if we had a boat. "Aw"—lantern-jawed listlessness—"a boat"—and his eyes grow as silly and uninspired as a mahseer's own. "Yes, a boat. Could we get a boat?" "Aw—a boat——" He spits, accurately, at a lizard on a stone six feet away. Silence.

But here one of the brats suddenly jumps to the occasion. A boat? The sahib wants a boat? *Ra*ther. And off he trots up the bank and disappears in the direction of the village, a mile away.

While he is away, let us drop a spoon into the head of the rapid where it lips and creams out of the upper pool. There *may* be a fish there, and there may be enough kick in the water to move the spoon a bit. Spoons, by the way, I am certain, attract not by twinkly appearance, or simulation of small fish swimming in difficulties, since—in the best water conditions—a spoon is invisible six feet away. I am positive that it is the vibration of the spinning metal in the water which communicates itself to some sense organ in the fish, who thereby becomes conscious of something unusual happening, and goes to look-see out of plain human curiosity; and it is only at the last moment that he spots the twinkly thing and makes a gulp at it. What else makes a salmon, who has no reason to feed in fresh waters, snap at a gaud which has no counterpart in Nature and which he could not possibly imagine to be food, even if he were feed-

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ing? Trout, dry fly, March Brown and coch-y-bondhu, are these arguments against the idea? Possibly; but the circumstances are quite different.

To the head of the rapid, then, where casting is easy; and let us hope for water which will twirl our spoon.

Cast once, cast twice—nothing. Keep on casting idly; the boy will be away some time, and there is nothing else to do. Suddenly the line tightens; the rod bends; in an agony of sudden hope we brace ourselves for the rush. Now, then; *now* he'll take it; soundly hooked; stand clear! . . . Nothing whatever happens. The moment grows to a second; the seconds multiply. We know of no such thing as a sulking mahseer. Must have fouled a rock. No, it doesn't feel like a rock, somehow. True, the line descends rigidly into the water; the rod bends its fullest. Worry it about? No, it's no rock; it has the intangible softness of something not rock at the other end. Must be a submerged log.

Worry and pull, up-stream, down-stream, at all angles; we are beginning to feel we shall lose a good trace and one of those invaluable armourer's spoons. Confound these logs!

And then, is it imagination? The line moves. Slowly, so slowly as almost to be imperceptible, the intersection of taut line and water moves; slowly, slowly up-stream.

Well, I'm damned. What the . . .

It moves slowly up-stream. Slow and unhurried, it moves; inexorably. We think of time; of the passage of years; of stately funerals passing down a long avenue; of the greying of hairs; of the growth of an oak; of the musketry training of an Indian recruit. Time is time no longer;

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the music of the spheres turns to the Dead March in Saul, while that double-dashed slow-motion submarine which we seem to have hooked bends the rod near to breaking-point and marches our line, cast, and spoon into the silent reaches of the upper pool.

"Kachwa," murmurs the listless shikari.

And then we know. One of those fresh-water turtles, as round and as flat as the shield of Achilles, and weighing anything up to a couple of hundred pounds, which share with the alligator the scavenging honours of all Indian rivers. Immovable, inflexible, nerveless, the reptile is probably foul-hooked in an obscene and scaly hind-leg, and is now steadily slow-marching perfectly good tackle up the bed of the river. His soul—if any—be it condemned to the nethermost pit! His female relations, be they . . . Snap! the rod straightens, and what remains of the line drifts ashore.

Well, well. Bend on another cast and spoon, and try again. There can't be any more turtles . . . whoop—plop—the spoon drops into the eddies.

Barely is it in and the line drawing, when *tsk!* all is taut once more, and a leaping presence twitches the top. With muscles tuned to the previous strain, and judgment all awry, we give him the butt, and with one mighty heave whisk a two-pound mahseer, a milky nursery denizen, into the air, where he flies overhead and lands with a thud in the reeds behind. Poor little devil; what a death!

The shikari wades into the reeds in search, while we stand, contrite and ashamed, and await the corpse. Yes, apparently two pounds, for by now we realise that that indispensable article,

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the spring-scale, has been left behind in cantonments. Stone dead, and not a wriggle left in him; the shock of the catastrophe must have killed him outright.

Try again. After two or three casts, off goes the spoon again. This time we let him buzz the reel. True, he puts no great strain on it; but we let him have his run, his last bit of watery joy, before we wind him in. He comes steadily ashore, and joins the stiff, stark, and petrified Little Billee. Four pounds, let us say. Back you go, my friend! A silvery parabola, and he splashes into the broken water. Let's hope he's the worse for nothing more than a sore lip.

In the next ten minutes it happens again, and once again. Five blank casts, and then yet once more. We're sick of this business of robbing the cradle. The big fish are down at the foot of the rapid. They certainly aren't here. Wind up, and let's wait for the boy.

Half an hour later, we see a thing like a dyticus water-beetle coming down the upper reaches. This presently enlarges to the small boy in an equally small punt-shaped object propelled by two stumpy and rickety oars. In that it swims on, in, and partly under water, the thing is a boat; but, good lord, what are we to do with it? The shikari, in obstinate gloom, offers no brain-waves. But the small boy is all smiles and confidence; here or hereabouts he takes charge; he is on, in this scene.

"You tumble in, sahib. *I'll* take you out into the river." He wriggles on the thwart and flourishes an oar.

"The deuce you will! You won't, in that thing; not if I know it."

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See the two holes in the bottom, insecurely stopped with bits of the lad's already inadequate only garment; observe the low freeboard; take note of the drunken wobble of the thing whenever five stone wriggles on the thwart.

"It's all right, sahib; fine boat."

After all, one supposes it's all right. The lad came down two sets of rapids to get here from the village.

We can't stop here all day. Let's think how we can use it.

We can't anchor it; it would swamp like half a walnut shell. It's no use drifting down the rapid in it; there'd be no pull on line or spoon, and nothing would spin. "Look here, lad; d'you think you could row *across* the rapid while I handle the rod? Row to the other side? You'll have to row mighty hard . . ."

He looks out over the water.

"Right, sahib; I'll try. Get in."

Little sportsman.

The normal couple of hundred yards' breadth of the quiet reaches of the river narrows, in the rapids, to a bare fifty from bank to bank. The water, confined and angry, chucks itself along at a wild pace, rising to a central wave which lies like a fretful backbone all down the centre. Luckily in this there were no apparent rocks; but the unaided water supplied all the necessary thrills, and to one making up his mind to venture it, a lot of unnecessary ones as well. Anyhow, there it was, and here were the glimmerings of a plan of campaign. *If* the boy could manage the rowing; and *if* the passenger could stand upright in the doddery coracle, *and* keep his line, partly unwound from the winch and coiled in the boat, from getting all snarled up; *and* keep a

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grip on the rod; *and* do it all without diving overboard instanter, why, then, it should be possible to spin a spoon in the base of the rapid while the boat goes from bank to bank. Let's try.

Unreel a good length of line. Coil it down in the bottom of the boat. Shorten up spoon and cast. The shikari to stand by and give us a shove off at the word 'go.' "Got it? All ready? Right." A swing of the rod, and the spoon swirls out into mid-stream. Simultaneously we leap into the stern-sheets and the shikari shoves off. "*Row*, you imp!" A lurch, and we subside, sitting, into three inches of water, grabbing the sides to prevent a dive overboard. Rod, line, spoon, all are forgotten in the one absorbing impulse to hang on to something solid as we prance out into deep water. The imp shouts and whirls his paddles, his arms going like pistons. The boat bounds over the water in one sweeping diagonal, as current and oars fight for mastery. And now we are in the middle; a leaping lurch, and we bound over the central wave; on and on, the motion gradually subsiding as we fetch up, breathless and helpless with laughing, in the backwater of the farther bank.

"Bravo, chokra!"

The nipper grins, leans his elbows on his oars, and salaams, panting, but merry. Rod, tackle, everything has been forgotten, till now a creak of the winch advertises a pull on the line. We look down-stream and see the slack of the line in the water, well below the rapid and on our side of the river. Good; then the spoon has travelled the right road. Wind in. The experiment works.

Here or hereabouts we have leisure to marvel

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at the fact that we have shipped hardly a hatful of water in the rush across. The chokra is busy stuffing the caulking-rags a little tighter, but more as a precaution. The coracle, by some marvel known only to heaven and Heath Robinson, works.

"Like to try again?" *Ra*-ther; he's all for it. We land, and tow the boat up-stream to the head of the rapid. And now, getting the hang of the drill, a certain confidence arises. On the second journey we are impelled to hang on with one hand only, holding the rod with the other, while, with one eye on the whirling water, the other watches the drift of the spoon, and notes how the diagonal course brings a sufficient pull on the line. Once only the eye leaves the line, what time we lurch over the central crest and swallow a displaced heart on the farther side.

Try again. And now we ride the waves kneeling, making efficient shift to spin the spoon just where it will do most good; and, unexpected development, we mark how the spoon slowly traverses the broken water at the base of the rapid—combing it, as it were, from side to side, and covering all the water. The chokra also marks it. "Right, sahib; that's where you'll get your fish."

Once more across, and the lad needs a breather. But in a minute we are off again. Now the spoon moves cleanly and surely, and, by the rod-tip, must be spinning well. We are almost into the far bank when—tug! Got him!

Quick, out on to the bank and play him. The struggle is short, being mainly confined to keeping the fish out of the reed-encumbered lower pool. He presently joins the backwash, and is played steadily into the shallows, where he flops helplessly. The chokra wades in behind him, and deftly heaves him on to the bank.

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Eight pounds? Let's say eight pounds. The chokra beats him on the head with a stone, and we get ready for another passage.

Twice we traverse, and twice draw blank. But the third time in mid-stream we strike it. *Whir-r-rr* of the winch. Ma-a-ai WORD! here's something at last! *Row*, chokra; put your back into it! And still the line whirrs out as we charge across to dry land and leap out, the rod straining and bending and the line stretching out after something that is going great guns across the lower pool.

Well, you know, looking back on it, there's nothing much to be said. It was just a case of playing a really big warrior of a fish; but what made it complicated was that the only possible stance was on a sand-spit which continued the bank before the reeds and jungle began; and the remainder was just the anxiety of keeping his majesty from fouling the line in reeds and trees. Luckily, he had no fancy for the shore; but I remember it struck me that it was like standing on the chancel steps and playing a fish all about the nave of a church, with pillars, font, and both transepts thrown in.

The rest is a confused blank. The entire world seems swallowed in two hands, a bending rod, a straining line, and the perpetual whirr out and click home of what seem infinite repetitions of give and take, what time the pressure of the rubber stud on the butt eats steadily into one's tummy.

Twice we lured him into shallow water, and twice he bolted madly as he felt it shoaling. The third time the swirl and whirl of water came to stay. There didn't seem to be a thrill worth having, after the mad period preceding; but

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the excitement when realisation came of *what* it was that was slowly coming to light through the shallows was a thing to itself.

Here one expects to record the fact that the shikari, who had been a passenger in the show so far—and third-class at that,—bungled the business; that the tackle broke on the final strain, and that thenceforth all was blood and blasphemy. But the fact remains that for this single once the man knew his business, and did it with a flourish.

A quarter of an hour later, when all things sane and extravagant, all things calm and frantic, in English and in Urdu, which could be said about a dead mahseer had been said, we threaded a cane rope through his gills, slung him on a pole and made a procession for camp, H.M.S. *Heath Robinson* left high and dry on the bank to look after herself.

Now, it has been noted that the spring-scale had been forgotten when the rest of the gear was packed; and as it behoved all and sundry to know exactly what that fish weighed, fresh out of water and before India's merry temperature had altered things for the worse, the question of a weighing-machine became pressing. Was there one in the village? Undoubtedly. Fetch it? Nay, sahib; it's the *chungi* (octroi post) weighing-machine, and the police thanadár wouldn't let us, even if we could lift it. We'll have to take the fish to the village.

So off again in procession, the two chokras toddling gamely along, the *machli* slung between and its tail sweeping the sand. We marched triumphantly up the middle of the village to the police post beyond, where the country carts pay

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octroi on their imports and an immense weigh-beam stands outside, its two platforms fit to seat a man apiece. A pile of pyramidal iron weights, with handles, stood on the verandah. Now, thinks I, these weights may be correct; on the other hand, they may not. Knowing what one knows of the simple villager and the ways of octroi posts far from white supervision, the probability lay with the not. No certifying marks on them. "Hey, thanadár-*ji*," and the thanadár slouched out, winding on a frowsy pugaree; he came to an untidy salute at sight of the party. One glance at that shifty eye; the weights were, beyond doubt, *not* correct. Oh, India. . . .

From the gathering crowd emerged the post-office babu. He stood and meditated over the fish. "You weighing fish, sar? Fish weigh approcks one hundredweight, sar. Moreover, it is fine fish, no doubt."

On to the scales with it.

I am no true fisherman. Failing a tape measure, I did not estimate the girth of that fish, and do not now state that its girth *was* so many inches, cubits, stadia, or parasangs. Deliberately, I have not stated that the fish was weighed on a pair of impeccable scales with certified weights by a translucently honest Government servant, and that the weight *was* such and such a number of pounds, poods, or metric tons—"and a bit over." Had I conformed with the above requirements, I should forthwith have taken rank as one of the orthodox Brethren. Being, therefore, only a 'fresher'—a first-year man,—one, figuratively, sitting on the threshold of greater things, and therefore lacking courage, I can only record the fact that my fish was weighed on a

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cranky scale, with unstamped weights, by a caitiff with a shifty eye; and that I *believe* its fresh dead weight (with what may have been a couple of pounds of loose water sluicing around inside) was, as it were, forty-five pounds.

May we leave it at that?

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VIII.

A FOOTNOTE.

On Younghusband's Expedition to Lhasa several books have been written. They were written in an era when authors were expected to be high-brows; and if they possessed learning that learning was expected of them in print, because it *was* print. A quarter of a century later, it is now possible to try to tell the story from the human angle, in the minor details of how the plus-or-minus man, the born-to-blush-unseen walla, may take a small part in big events and may find amusement in the telling of the little things; of how the daily dinner was got (or failed in the getting), and the night's rest came (or did not), and of how it feels to go three months without changing a pair of socks. A footnote, in fact, to the bigger events which writers record for subsequent historians; events through which they would have the normal man stride in seven-league boots, his head in the clouds, and flicking the heads off the dandelions (bowing low as he passes) with a field marshal's baton. Whereas, in very truth, the same man tramps slowly and in great discomfort, his mind fixed on selfish trifles, and, without remission or intermission, most damnably and exceptionally cold.

The main political and military events, there-

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fore, have, of set purpose, been avoided. These will be found in the books; but here very little of battles or treaties. The rôle of the historian will therefore lapse into that of the *gamin*, the under-oaf, whom we meet as a human document in Chaucer, but who has been all too lacking in the chronicles since his day; and if the below-stairs style of treating the matter should strike an incongruous note, be sure that the *en bas*, from cook to tweenie, is every bit as necessary to the structural cosmos of the tale as are the strategists and treaty-makers *en haut*.

The unhalting success of the biggest shot in the dark, of our frontier history, I ascribe to the personality of one man. This man shared every littlest part of it with the least and lowest of us; one man bore the dirt and cold and dinginess with less complaint than any of us; one man took as many personal, and ten times as many moral, risks. One man, short, sturdy, and silent; not the strong silent man of fiction who is generally silent in that he has nothing to say, but a man silent from experience and from an almost intuitive love of the waste places of the world. A man who, unassuming and courteous, had tasted adventure in wide variety; who, ragged and trail-worn, hungry, thirsty, and begrimed, could view with joy a world of big deserts, hard living, and continual danger; a world composed of a tawny-yellow plain supporting on its uninterrupted rim an immeasurable blue vault, and nothing in between but a line of plodding camels, a few silent camel-men, and a white man walking ahead across the endless wastes of the Gobi Desert; a world of snow and ice and avalanche, with a few stout hillmen for companions, whose stiff courage needed just his added courage to induce them to venture,

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with him, the nightmare crossing of the Mustagh Pass; a world of chattering diplomats and schemers; a world of quiet peace inserted, at rare intervals, into the framework of great adventures. No world of them all but found him kindly of nature, forceful of character, direct and simple of purpose. A silent man. His head a little bent, his eyes a little sunken under beetling brows; and the faintest, slightest lilt in his walk as of one who knew the world ungarnished, and all the simple straightforward men who used that world—and loved it all.

If this footnote to a great adventure—which was Younghusband's own adventure—fails to show his wise directing hand in every little part of it, and the spirit of the man which inspired us all, then will it indeed have failed.

I.

The books which we have noted are all worth the reading. Since we have read them—and most of us have—there remains only to give a short summary of those aspects which, in the broad, have been explained by all, and are therefore common ground.

In 1903 Lord Curzon, Viceroy, was confronted with a situation critical to one to whom the safeguarding of India by the inviolability of her frontiers, and a strenuous antipathy to the Russ wherever found, were very stuff o' conscience. Briefly, Russia was trying to gain a protectorate over that mistily unknown and obstinately mediæval land of Tibet, whose steady exclusiveness had formed the principal safeguard of India's northern frontiers; while Tibet, like a scraggy

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elderly virgin, was beginning to simper in return. Within a very short space of time the Government at home—not yet undermined by hostile demagogues—had given permission that the matter might be undertaken; and Lord Curzon had sent for the one man whose past record and abiding steadfastness of character warranted his being chosen for a task the difficulties of which none could gauge, since they were unknown.

The diplomatic aim was clear, that of obtaining an unconditional surrender from a Government composed of obstinate monks who had joined hands with our enemy. That the surrender could be brought about only by military force nobody, least of all the leader of the expedition, doubted for a moment; our history of unsuccess in verbal dealings with these people was notorious. Yet, for very fairness' sake, some such attempt at achievement by reasoning had to be made; firmness, fairness, unruffled temper; but, in the last resort, force; for such a singular attempt, had it failed, would have damaged for a generation our prestige on the principal frontier of the Empire.

But here all clearness stopped dead. The land itself was a mystery. What little information existed about it had been gathered by a few daring men, mostly native, who, at long intervals, had crept into the country at considerable risk and had, not invariably, emerged, bringing news. Few, perhaps half a dozen in all the records, had penetrated to Lhasa itself. The movements of all had been confined to the narrow path which carried the exiguous single-file trade of the land; their view bounded by what they could see from the track; their living limited to the capacity of the evening caravanserai; their information gathered by chance remarks at long intervals,

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lest suspicion be aroused; their very results verbal and memorised, where written records might well have been a death-warrant. The sum-total of it all, expressed and implied, would hardly have carried a platoon from India to Lhasa.

In every instance the traveller had tacked himself on to a small caravan, such caravans as could find shelter and feeding at the posts dotted at long intervals along the mule-route. No caravan might exceed a certain small number of beasts, since everything in excess of that would certainly starve. For here was a land of emptiness; a cold desert, with a few oases supporting a scanty population; too high, except in a few spots, to produce the means of feeding man; too cold for a blade of wild grass; too barren to support even a raven to peck at the frozen corpse by the wayside. In such a land an invading force might exhaust its resources and starve in a week. Everything would have to be carried.

Here it is that the ragtag and bobtail—to wit, we of the minor military responsibilities—find our interest in the matter taking shape; for it is just this matter of carrying, of transport, which is the first preoccupation of any man or body of men advancing into the unknown. The problem, subject to the wise decisions of our leaders, was present to one and all of us throughout the expedition, and never once did the situation ease itself. Never once could we, or would we, have taken the thing lightly; for on it depended not only our creature comforts but our lives, no less. I put it, therefore, in the forefront of our personal preoccupations.

The difficulty of advancing into a desert on one's own carrying power resolves itself into this—not only has the load to be carried, but the carrier

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has to be supplied with the energy wherewith to carry. Put at its maximum, if a mule, carrying 160 lb., be asked to carry his own food alone with nothing else useful to an expedition added, and if the mule eats ten pounds a day, you may march him for sixteen days into the wilderness. There you will stop; and, failing food, the mule will lie down and die; and there you are. Similarly, you may take him eight days' march into the desert, and straightway come eight marches back again to your base, arriving just in time to draw your to-morrow's rations. Either way, you will make no progress; and when it is considered that, on an expeditionary basis, the mule's food may only be 15 per cent of his own load of mixed necessities for his masters, it is clear that, failing some novel solution, your beast of burden will get you only two and a half days forward on your journey.

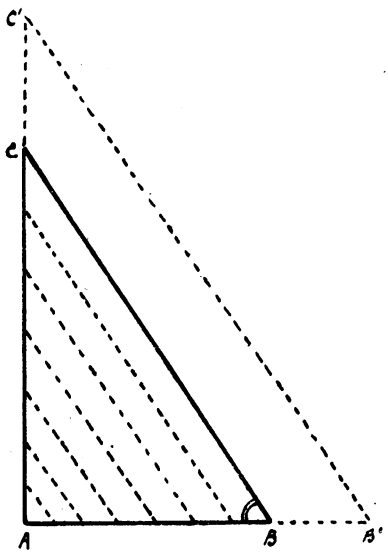
The solution lay, imprimis, in finding some animal which would work but not eat, or in so multiplying its carrying power that the consumption would be negligible. In the light of zoology, as then known, the former seemed out of the question; in the latter case, wheeled transport seemed indicated, since a beast will, on good surfaces, drag three times what he can carry. Those of us who, when the expedition was in its infancy, sat at the base and gazed across the Darjeeling foothills at the towering walls of the greatest ice and rock barrier on this earth, may well have smiled at the notion of wheels.

As Kipling told his audience at the Royal Geographical Society in 1914,[1] where men's minds work on the strain of a problem, the solution often presents itself to them in the form of a dia-

[1] See 'A Book of Words,' p. 99.

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gram. Words, orders, descriptions fail; but a stump of pencil and the back of an envelope sometimes provide the key. So here. And the diagram was thus :—



Let ABC be a right-angled triangle, with the right angle at A.

Let AC be the distance to be advanced.

Now if AB be subdivided into equal divisions, each of which represents the carrying power which will suffice to advance a force one division, a day's march, along the line AC, and if from these points on AB lines parellel to BC be drawn to intersect with AC, it follows that by lengthening AB indefinitely beyond B (say to B'), AC can be made as long as you wish (as at C'). In other words, that by using unlimited transport at the outset,

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you can get as far as you require. Further, *ex hypothesi*, the value of the angle ABC represents the diminution of carrying power due to the transport eating a portion of its own load; since, were there no diminution, AC and BC would be parallel, or would coincide, and there would then be neither problem nor 'triangle of problem' representing it.

True, O king. That would work very well if the force could march on one broad straight front, over flat country with no obstacles. But here we had a force, till the open plains were reached, advancing on the narrowest known front, that of one man; in fact, in single file. Transport, at the outset, could therefore not be unlimited, for the length of a line of transport is governed by the length of the day's march, the *reductio ad absurdum* being reached where the head of the column has reached its evening halting-place before the tail of its transport has left the last camping-ground, the route in between being thereupon packed with laden mules in single file.

AB and AC therefore acquired a limit in terms of one day's march; and, though the knowledge of the value of the angle ABC as a 'coefficient of evaporation' was valuable, the problem was still far from solved.

Thereupon, after much cogitation and even more argument, the Bright Idea was born. Such ideas are *not* born, Minerva-like and fully armed, from the brain of one Olympian, but are usually the result of suggestions and siftings in the 'Portugee parliament' into which, in the end, technical discussions among a group of soldiers resolve themselves. "Look here, laddo, why can't we . . ." or, "I say, won't this do. . . ." So with the Bright Idea. In its ultimate shape it resolved itself into the fact that if a big convoy of food, with just

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sufficient men to guard it, were rushed into the country and the mules immediately brought out again, the food would remain while the bugbear of hungry mules to diminish it would cease to affect the problem. In other words, the idea evolved was the Theory of Advanced Depots. By this theory, it was possible to place a small force inside the first limits of Tibet and then, by a 'tip and run' process of sending in large convoys of necessaries whose mules forthwith retreated to pick up further loads next day, to pile up sufficient rations for man *and* beast to make a big accumulation. When the accumulation had grown sufficiently large, it would then be possible to bring up the wasteful mules, base them on the new dump, and let them live on it while the force made another bound forward, the whole process being repeated *ad infinitum*, or till finality had been reached in our argument with the Tibetans.

The 'triangle' thereupon once more came into operation, since a series of such 'bounds' forward would be represented by a series of triangles, each resting on the apex of the last, the hope and determination being that the apex of the final triangle would coincide with Lhasa or some such other point where the Tibetans would collapse.

How far this anticipation was from realisation will subsequently be seen.

One last factor limiting the solution to advances 'by bounds,' and preventing movement from several bases in India to converge on Tibet, thereby multiplying the avenues of supply, was the fact that, five marches from the base, the single-file track traversed the one single narrow pass which, in full view of Kanchenjunga and close to Everest, crosses the backbone of the Himalaya at a point higher than the highest point of Europe. The

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Jelap La Pass. Over this wicked obstacle every atom of gear larger than the load of one side of a mule which was required by the expedition had to be man-handled in such subdivisions as would make it seizable and carryable by coolies; for a mule will carry, and will barge ahead over bad obstacles, but he is at a loss when it comes to wriggling, humouring, and generally persuading an awkward load over a nearly unclimbable bit of ground. This bottle-neck near the very outset of the problem at one time bade fair to paralyse the whole solution, since, apart from the fact that it constricted what should have been the smooth flow of supplies, it had also to be kept open, and used, in weather ranging from calm though frozen sunshine to the bitterest blizzard. Had the bottle-neck ever closed, the expedition would inevitably have been strangled.

The mule was our unit of calculation, and well it was for us that he was so. For, in any circumstances, in any weather, in any temperature, even when the mercury in the bulb got sulky and refused to register, the mule played the game. It might have been thought that such an expedition would be murderously wasteful in animals; but the mule, whether starved, up to his ears in a snowdrift, or, as once happened, up to his neck for twelve hours in a frozen lake into which he had pitched from an overhanging height, the ice making him a collar—worked, overworked, rested, and overworked again,—the mule came out of it with colours (and heels) flying. In some queer way known only to mules, they, going into the country normally fine-drawn, came out of it *romping fat!*

He is a mass of contradictions, is the mule; *plus* where every other beast is *minus*, and nega-

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tive where the rest of creation is positive. So it is hardly to be wondered at that, at the end, the officers of the many mule-corps on the expedition were able to report that their casualties, after a year on the roof of the world, were actually less than those of an ordinary twelvemonth in cantonments.

In common with all other frontier officers, past and present, this scribe rises from his chair, closes his heels, and solemnly takes off his hat to the mule. Rough, ill-tempered, and unnecessarily handy with teeth and heels, the 'khachhar' of the supply and transport is a sahib; one whom you may fittingly ask to dine at the mess on guest-nights, propose for membership of your club, or introduce to your wife and daughters.

. . . . . .

There was, at first sight, nothing in the land itself which would lighten our transport difficulties. With the exception of a few scattered oases which supported a population incommensurate with the vastness of the land, and disproportionately large colonies of monks, the country was empty. Smooth your hand along the table. Bare. Just like that. From such a population, deliberately limiting itself by polyandry to the margin of what the soil would produce, little surplus could be hoped. Yet one thing it had which, for a time, seemed as if it would solve our transport problem; an uncouth beast of burden which, in some primeval fashion, seemed to be able to pick up a living off the bitter barrens across which we were slowly advancing. Watch it for an hour, when turned loose to 'graze.' At the end of the time you would swear a solemn oath that its diet was stones and shingle. As a matter of fact, it seems to be able to dig up with

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its great fore-feet a subsoil saxifrage moss of sorts, a thing which must be almost chemically concentrated nourishment to support such a vast and hairy bulk.

Yaks.

Great, ponderous, slow-moving beasts, proof against cold and wind, carrying dependent from their underparts a great sagging mass of tangled woolly hair wherein stones, bits of straw and stick and, you would say, even birds' nests, had there been birds, combined to form a swinging mattress whereon the beast subsided to sleep; head and horns carried low, tail vast and bushy, the wool of which, alone, would have been enough to stuff three pillows; and, between the two, a mass of disgruntled depression.

With vast internal rumblings, glowering eyes half-closed and expressionless, and an inveterate habit of grinding his teeth while he rolled along at a reluctant one and a half miles an hour, the yak nursed that hidden and groundless grievance against all mankind, and everything in general, which was such a puzzle to us to the very end. This self-absorbed yak pessimism was our greatest asset in dealing with the beast. Had it permitted the co-existence of nerves, of shyings, buttings, and other caracolings, we should have been hard put to it indeed in a land the altitude of which made a dropped load a labour for three panting men to readjust, and where the chasing of a runaway animal would have been clean out of the question. The infectious depression to be got from half an hour of his company was enough to make you go out and howl at the moon. Rarely does a scientific label reflect a human attribute; but in *Bos grunniens* we have not only a pointedly true but an inevitable name for the grousing ox.

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Deep though the gloom was which surrounded him, he came as a ray of sunshine to us. Here, at last, was the zoological contradiction in terms, the beast which would live, work, and apparently eat nothing; the beast which would carry a load without eating it. By some means known only to the organiser of our Transport Department, they were collected in droves which at one time touched the two thousand mark; and though they worked with unconquerable reluctance, moved slowly, and could never be cured of the habit of lying down and dying, they lightened our transport problem at a time when the difficulty seemed insurmountable.

Indeed, at one time they bade fair to do more. The Himalayan barrier once crossed, and the wide plateaux across which we moved stretching apparently steadily before us, it was not long before half a dozen of us were thinking out the possibility of wheeled transport. None was there, of course, in a land which had not a wheel, except a prayer-wheel, within its borders. But could it be got? Up from India presently came some dozens of the light two-wheeled *ekka* of the Punjab. These, dismantled, and man-handled piecemeal across the passes, were put together on the plains.

From this emerged the Joke. The depression of the grunting ox simply invited leg-pulling. We would harness him to the ekka, and he should add to his already superlative value by pulling three times what he could carry. It was this scribe's privilege to attend at the first séance when, the harness having been thought out, made, and put together, it was intended to introduce the furry slumbering volcano to the strange wheeled thing. No Buffalo Bill's Show ever provided

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more thrilling anticipation and preparation. A white officer volunteered to be the first to harness the brute. Surprise was great when the yak made no demur whatever; indeed, come to think of it, you would hardly expect a beast with an almost bullet-proof coat to be seriously tickled by breast-band, crupper, and traces. We led him slowly up to the ekka; with infinite precautions we lowered the shafts on to his flanks; quickly. but very gingerly, we made fast the girth and hitched the traces; and, finally, jumped clear in expectation of the absolutely inevitable explosion.

Nothing happened.

Dead silence!

Here were we, literally making history in harnessing a bit of the Ice Age to the works of the twentieth century, and the extraordinary animal refused even to acknowledge an event with the importance of which bloodshed would have been quite in keeping.

Grunch . . . Grunch . . . he nursed his grievance.

Long silence.

"At least he'll wake up when he begins to draw the thing, and it rattles?"

Not a bit. He, and, later, a dozen others like him, allowed themselves to be perfectly peaceably harnessed and led; seeming, if anything, to like it.

All that the achievement implied was not immediately realised—the transport of six *maunds* where two, only, had been possible. But as soon as realised it was wired off to the Chief Transport Officer, and a large order for more ekkas was at once sent down to India.

To our lasting regret, by the time these had been obtained, trained to the base, dismembered and lugged laboriously over the passes, the expedition was too far forward to benefit by them. One

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imagined, to the end, a well-drilled line abreast of gruntulous bovines advancing slowly across the Plain of the Holy of Holies, and the immediate collapse of the obstinate mystics with whom we had come to treat. Boadicea's chariots . . . Hannibal's elephants. . . . One of the romances of military history was, in the end, still-born.

. . . . . .

By mule, by yak, by coolie, and, sparsely, by ekka, the column moved forward. Dooms slow.

II.

Throughout every problem, hitch, and solution, we had the wise and steady guidance of our leader. He shared our daily life, subject always to the fact that he would interfere with no man's task when once the task had been set; nobody knew better than he that the one way to make a man trustworthy is to trust him. But, the day's work over, somewhere before dinner-time any one of the several mess-tents of the various units would fill up with a heterogeneous collection of soldiers, transport officers, interpreters, journalists, antiquarians, Sappers of the survey, the *omnium gatherum* of an expedition which brought the most divergent types into common concord, and drove them to a 'gin-crawl' in one another's messes. Or rather was it a 'rum-crawl'; few private mess-stores were there, on which to mix our drinks, and rum was a commissariat issue.

Then, through our blue fog of tobacco and a smell like the inside of a methylated spirit can, would peer a bearded face, and the sturdy, solemn figure of Younghusband would loom into the lantern light. A dozen would get up to offer him

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their camp-chairs, as he asked, "May I come in?" and closed the tent-flap quickly behind him to keep out the bitter cold. The kindly brown eyes under the bushy eyebrows would put at his ease the most self-conscious subaltern among us; eyes that bent with a very human appreciation to the warm brown stuff handed to him in an enamel mug. One can still remember the characteristic push forward of the wide firm underlip, which gathered in a mouthful of walrusy moustache whereto a few drops had adhered.

But even he could not help us—unless by sharing with us—what I was going to call our next problem; hardly our next, in that it was with us from the outset and never abated. The cold.

The bitter and penetrating cold, still and sterile by night, rising to the incessant grit-laden gales of icy wind which blew with devastating venom from the north from nine in the morning to sunset —day in, day out, without intermission—was with us always; but, after the first gasp of surprise at what an almost lunar cold could be, comment on it ceased. To hear "Brr-rr-r, isn't it *cold!*" marked the tyro, just as, "Oh lord, *isn't* it hot!" labelled the griffin in the land whence we had come. The unalleviated misery of it was common to us all. Before creeping into the sleeping-bag and strapping the canvas cover of the valise over the whole, we put extra clothing on to our already thick day-wear. The sleeper lay on his back, since a sideways turn would open a leak of air into the bag. When he awoke in the morning, just below his chin there would be a small white pyramid on the valise cover where his breath, freezing an inch from his lips, had fallen in light snow during the night. If his servant had the energy to bring a cupful of boiling hot tea at

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dawn, and put it down by the pillow, quick must be the sahib to unravel himself and reach for it, for in a moment it was tepid, and in a minute the cup would have frozen to the saucer.

Rifle oil froze, and the mechanism had to be bright-polished to prevent it from jamming solid. The jackets of the machine-guns held a mixture of rum and water, lest they should emulate a bursting water-pipe. Boots, whether on the feet or off, were taken to bed with the owner, otherwise he would never have been able to get them on again. The Frozen Waterfall at Dotha was one of the sights of the expedition, a straight column of ice one hundred and fifty feet high and twenty-five feet thick, formed by layer after layer of water coagulating as it dribbled over the edge and freezing solid ere it reached the bottom—a sheer tower of iridescent beauty weighing an incalculable number of tons, the father of all icicles. Our troubles from the cold were the commonplaces of daily and nightly life, and barely mentioned; tales on the subject got poor hearing unless, on rare occasions, they had a lighter aspect, as, for instance, that of an officer who came up later. The first night over the pass, lacking counsel, he put his teeth into a tumbler of water. In the morning he reached for the tumbler and found it frozen solid, his dentures in the midst like a quail in aspic. He had to go to the cook-house to thaw them out, or there would have been no breakfast for him.

Why to the cook-house? With pain and trouble, enough fuel was brought up for cooking purposes, and every pound husbanded where it weighed as much, and took as much transport, as the food it cooked. From first to last we were dependent for warmth on the natural heat of our bodies; had a

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camp-fire even once been lit, it would have aroused as instant a protest as would the sight of a man lighting his pipe with a five-pound note. Even then the fuel ration had to be doubled; water, at 15,000 feet, boils at 180° Fahrenheit, and the boiling process has to be long to break down the fibres of what is cooked. At some of the greater altitudes, as the Everest Expedition discovered, it is possible to put a hand into a kettle freshly boiled for tea, and suffer no more than discomfort.

In that first winter—indeed, throughout the expedition except during the two months of summer—personal cleanliness went by default. Had there been fuel to spare for hot water, the bath would have suffered the same fate as that of the teacup. There was no shaving, and a most atrocious beard disguised everybody. A change of underclothing became a risky adventure, rarely to be indulged in; and since going to bed involved only the addition of more clothing to that of the day, the matter was steadily overlooked. The writer remembers two pairs of thick socks, pulled one on top of the other at the beginning of November, the start, and removed on Leap Year's Day. The legs and feet were normal, but the soles had been compacted into a kind of hard felt which resisted separation and, force being used, snapped like a biscuit.

Did you know that though snakes shed their skin all of a piece, the human animal, apparently lazier, sheds his bit by bit? It was certainly news to us. But one memorable day, when the bitter wind dropped for once to a blessed peace, and the mercury awoke, stretched, and turned over in its bulb preparatory to another long sleep, several of us took our courage in both hands, crawled into bed, and changed! Arriving sub-

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sequently in the mess, and rather vainglorious —as men may be who have overcome the weaknesses of the flesh,—we compared notes, and decided that what our skins really needed was not a bath at all, but a good stiff clothes-brush. "Furfuraceous desquamation," the still-in-statu-quo doctor muttered into his fur-lined beard; "you fellows are in the last and most infectious stage of scarlet fever. That's what's the matter with you. I'll have to see about it. Damned lepers."

We ought to have been the worse for this condition of non-changing. But we were not. For, somehow, the imagination saw the lesser companions of the human race—whether visible to the naked eye or under the microscope—advancing up the Himalayan wall, and, at somewhere about the snow-line which we had long overpassed, waving helpless antennæ, shaking sorrowful and chitinous heads, and turning back home again.

The air was so sterile that even an exposed film would keep, without deterioration, for months before being developed. Skins of dead beasts never went bad, but dried to parchment. Commissariat losses—by marching mules nibbling the compacted rectangular blocks of compressed fodder on one another's backs into octahedrons, dodecahedrons, and other multilateral and polyangular travesties of the original load—were severe; but losses from deterioration, that unfailing stand-by of the commissariat babu who has inaccurate accounts to square, simply never occurred.

The sorry human débris of our first battlefields, left perforce unburied on frozen shingle on which no pick-axe could make an impression, were there months later when we passed on our way home. Fingers shrivelled, lips retracted from white teeth, but otherwise normal human beings—asleep.

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Define it? Would it be too ambitious, or too incredible, were one to say that for a year we lived in an air that was literally aseptic?

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Every atom of this discomfort was our leader's as much as our own. Was he back at the base, or even on the inner Himalayan slope where *some* fuel, at least, survived? Not he. Right at the top of the line, where discomforts were worst and dangers afterwards thickest, he sat with an inadequate escort and gave his henchmen leave (as they also had the liking) to build up the show behind him till all might move forward again. He never hurried nor worried us, even though the advanced bases, the accumulations for the forward bounds, moved slowly and more slowly; for by now it was obvious that the expedition would be opposed, and something more than a ration-guard at the head of the line became necessary. The foremost body grew into an armed camp which ate up the stuff almost as fast as it accumulated.

III.

And here we come to our next preoccupation—the Tibetans, who, from this time onwards, rather took charge of the stage, and relegated our other worries to a running accompaniment.

Three months had passed in making the 'bounds' which brought us to the point of active opposition. Younghusband's diplomacy, always ready to negotiate with the lamas if thereby he could obtain the irreducible minimum of the guarantees deemed necessary, was steadily met by "Shoo!" "Avaunt!" *vade retro Sathanas*, and other forms of monkish discouragement which showed an

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increasing bitterness, and at last developed into threats. Nobody wished to fight if negotiation were possible; but it soon became obvious that the Dalai Lama who ruled the land looked forward to our evacuation of southern Tibet as a matter of necessity, since it was never believed either that our supply arrangements were at the time sufficient, or that they would grow increasingly efficient. Pull devil, pull baker, we did it somehow; and when once the stage of improvisation had passed and things moved smoothly, however slowly, the opposition passed from voluble chatterings to a grim silence which covered many possibilities. Rumours reached us from time to time of armies about to descend on us, including such picturesque details as mailed horsemen who, unfortunately, never materialised. But it was not long before the lamas turned loose on us soggy great hordes of the stout fighting material of the country. These, though archaically armed, were no whit reluctant, and were a sufficiently tough proposition to a modern force fighting under compulsorily mediæval conditions; from first to last they never outnumbered us by less than seven or ten to one.

They settled in a swarm at a point some seven miles in advance of where sat Younghusband cheek by jowl with our foremost outposts. With the Mongolian inborn faith in a wall, a faith dating from prehistorical times—whether the defence were across a valley, round a city, or about the fringes of an empire,—these Tibetans built them a wall where the open plain was narrowed by a large frozen lake and an outlying spur of one of the ranges. From the edge of the lake to the bottom of the cliff they built it, thus barring the track by which we would advance. Inveterate

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builders, as all Tibetans are, they ran it up in a night. It was their equivalent for 'full stop.' No compromise.

Reconnoitred, it was a wall right enough; and the area beyond was a brown and buzzing beehive.

Next morning, very early, our leader was missing. Who were we to question his movements? He had probably ridden back, on one of his errands, down the line. But that evening the look-out sentry signalled back to us the approach of two horsemen from the direction of the Tibetans; and, shortly afterwards, Younghusband rode in. He looked despondent, a little more silent than usual. Why? Because he, knowing in his bones that the archaic obstructionists should, in common fairness, be given the chance of avoiding Gurkha, Sikh, and Pathan, and the incredible effects of modern rapid fire—knowing, moreover, what can be done by one man armed with courtesy, tact, and a clear idea of what he wanted—had got up early that morning. Taking one orderly and no escort, he had ridden out to the Tibetan wall, had passed through into the camp and, neglecting the debased and impossible lamas, had asked for the biggest civil and military officials present. With these he had sat down to a day-long argument—an argument which, stripped of trimmings, resolved itself into a question of whether they, barring his way, should clear out, or whether he should pack up and go back to India.

Neither side erred in courtesy or good manners. We may imagine Younghusband—as we saw him often afterwards—well-versed in the punctilio of Mongolian debate, seated on a spread carpet facing the three big hats; legs crossed, hands up sleeves, sliding and slipping along in the singsong monosyllables; each fresh sentence prefaced by

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the sizzling intake of breath through closed teeth, the hallmark of ceremony, and the slight bowing forward from the waist in rhythm with the points of his argument; the 's's' all most ceremoniously flattened to 'z's'; the right hand only removed from within the left sleeve to raise it, palm outwards, forefinger and thumb joined, and the least little side-to-side waggle of the finger-tips till, the point made, the hand slid back up the other sleeve and the body half-bowed again from the waist; the little uplift of the bushy eyebrows, and the flattening of the deep rift between the two, big, brown spaniel-eyes; the halt on the rising voice, and the silence which marked the close of one more period in his argument.

Then the patience—the '*La*-lö' interjection at the proper places and the slight bow, as each of the points in the opposing argument was made.

Hour after hour, without a mistake, holding tenaciously and single-handed to a single purpose, and never once erring in the *bienséance* of oriental good manners; hour after hour, point and counterpoint, each driving the other into a corner whence each in turn cleverly escaped and started the interminable round once more; no point of ceremony omitted, even though his legs must have passed from pins and needles to numbness and on to an almost complete absence of feeling; even though hour by hour his hunger must have grown ravenous, and he touched nothing; even though his very life hung, as it must have hung in that campful of puzzled hostility, hour after hour by a single steadily fraying thread.

So might Kublai Khan, so might the Khan's remotest ancestor, have held converse with ambassadors.

In word, in voice, manner and gesture, in play

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of features and in the instinctive tact of generations of good blood behind him, he, sitting alone on the roof of the world, must have come very near to convincing the mediævalism which faced him.

Absolutely fruitless. *Non possumus*, without any modification.

Be sure that when at last he failed, as fail he did, no other Englishman could have come so close to success.

At the end, the three big hats—standing most mannerly at bridle and stirrup—assisted him on to his horse. He rode silently out of the camp. Last and least little touch of ceremony, till he was well out of sight of the wall he forbore to turn up his coat-collar against the bitter wind.

And now do you understand me when I say that that man's smallest wish, unexpressed or half-divined, was both law and stimulus to the least of us?

The man is still alive? Bad taste, this way of speaking of him? Point-blank, I refuse to admit it. In these days, when organised societies exist for the glorification of the living, when politicians publish their autobiographies, and when self-made magnates preview and annotate advanced copies of 'interviews' with them written for the Stunt Press—are we to refuse to the most unpretentious of men, happily still with us, a little of what a whole province once gave to John Nicholson? I, who write this, can remember the very way in which he held his reins bunched in his left hand, and the fact that his right hand was in his coat-pocket as he, coming in quietly by the back way, rode into camp that evening. And that was twenty-six years ago.

Well, well; he did his best for them, apart

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from what he tried to accomplish for us and for our mission. There was brilliant unwisdom in it, for the expedition might well have been decapitated, and what other head could have taken his place on those heaving and struggling shoulders? Or, worse, he might have been held as a hostage for our return to India; in which case he would undoubtedly have had to be sacrificed. He knew it, and faced it, he who held self so lightly and the job in hand so seriously. He did his best for the Tibetans; and when, a short time afterwards, the main force had concentrated once more at his headquarters at the head of the line, and had gone out—man, horse, and gun—to see to the business of the wall, he still did his best for them to the last possible moment, since our orders were to disarm them, if possible, and to avoid a fight if avoidance were feasible.

It was, alas, a match to a powder magazine. Some hours later, the wall and the plain beyond it were a shambles. Pass quickly over what happened; many of you will have read of it in all its ghastly details; but the man who, apart from his own lacerations, felt as acutely as any of us the pitiful futility of it all, was Edmund Candler, whom many 'Maga' readers will remember, and whom, with seven sword-cuts dinted into him, this scribe helped to bandage back into human semblance.

Thereafter it was war, pure and simple. We passed over the wreckage of Guru and its wall, fought the fight of the Red Gorge, as spectacular a piece of mediæval warfare as could be wished, and presently found ourselves at the town of Gyantse. A town, save the mark; but one of three in all Tibet, the other two being Lhasa and Shigatse; none of them bigger than, say, the

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small township of Reigate, in Surrey. I say mediæval warfare, since we, a modern force, were stripped of half our advantage by the ever-present transport question, which shortened our stride in even the simple war-gear of those days, particularly in ammunition for the mountain battery which proved later our main means of blowing an entrance into the extraordinarily solid buildings which the Tibetans defended against us; and in the rabbit-warren alleys between houses packed together for warmth, a gas-pipe gun was quite as effective as a rifle. Apart from this, the Tibetans always heavily outnumbered us, and it says much for our fighting material which went to Lhasa that the issue of many of the fights turned out as well as it did.

As a single instance, the record in altitude above sea-level was held by the fight at the Kharo La, the last before entering Lhasa, where our main body forced the pass at 16,400 feet, while we of the Gurkhas on their right flank climbed a glacier and fought a crisp little battle on our own at 19,000. Nothing much for the Gurkha? Possibly not; but the normal habitat of the Sikhs who were the spear-point of the attack on the pass itself is, as near as makes no matter, at sea-level.

The military situation was never free from anxiety, nor was there ever a time when our leader could have taken a liberty with the powers of our opponents. Any *bundobust* had to be brass-bound and copper-bottomed in a country where man, his land, and his climate were each and all poised for a sudden swoop on any weak joint in our armour. Had a disaster occurred, help from India would of necessity have been as slow to arrive as was our initial advance, and therefore valueless. The force was as much *en l'air* as was

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ever an expedition to the Pole. In these circumstances, defeat or a decided check was out of the question. The fighting portion saw to that; but Younghusband's was the foresight which never put us in an unmanageable situation.

IV.

At Gyantse he sat, with a barely adequate escort, and did his utmost to gather to him responsible leaders of the Tibetans with whom to negotiate. No opportunity was there to go out and repeat his previous single-handed heroic madness, trying to argue the obstinate obstructionists into a treaty which would cover all our requirements. The obstructionists simply were not there, though the more or less aggressive messages which they sent in from points unidentifiably distant relieved the otherwise impossible blankness of a complete refusal to treat.

We, the main force, had perforce to go back many marches. The transport situation would never have fed us, up at the top, and we were in the position of having made our bound forward as it were an overdraft on the bank; and the balance had to be squared. But Younghusband was there at the top—could he have been anywhere else?—and we had left with him Gurkhas of the writer's regiment, and Sikhs, the two together the stiffest stuff in the expedition, to see to it that he came to no harm; and just enough food on which to live.

What happened next we all know. In the midst of promises to negotiate, dates fixed for conferences, and all the other camouflage of political trickery which the monks could devise, one

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night they let loose on him and his small escort a horde of yelling fiends who only just failed to swarm into the camp on all sides and obliterate it. A merry night for Younghusband, who, with a borrowed rifle and bayonet, took an hour's holiday from thinking and planning, and, in the fore-front of it all, fought as part of a group of elated little Gurkhas who knew not in the darkness, and little cared, who might be the berserk sahib among them who was making of it a battle so debonair.

Then followed a weary long wait, in which the Tibetans, learning caution from what had happened to them that night, tried encirclement, siege of a sort, and long-range bombardment with primitive ordnance which made a devastating noise and with which they at first slung irregular lumps of roughly spherical iron or lead on to a target which none could miss, which metals presently failing, the spheres became a rich red copper, prized by many of us ever since; they make beautiful paper-weights. By modern standards, it was all the sorriest wig-pulling and face-scratching, and the escort more than held its own.

It was, however, getting thoroughly tired of it by the time when we were once more able to bring up the main force; and in a fight, which at last really *was* a fight, and which hung for a long day in the balance, were able to wipe off the slate the seven thousand Tibetans who, in a mediæval fortress overlooking Younghusband's camp, seemed at first to be almost too heavy metal for us.

Details both of the fighting and of the fruitless negotiations between periods of fighting, are on record in the books to which I have referred, so they need not be enlarged on here. The cardinal fact, however, emerged that after nine months of

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mixed battle and blarney we were as far as when we started from coming to terms with the lama hierarchy. Lhasa itself became increasingly evident as the only place in which we could apply final and conclusive pressure; and since conclusion there must be, we must get to Lhasa.

Slowly and painfully we had achieved the apparently impossible, and had brought half-way to its destination a force fit to cope with any opposition likely to be offered to us; and this along a line of communications which lay astride country unmapped, unknown, and the most difficult outside the Arctic Circle. We could not have done it a day earlier. As it was, every 'bound' had strained transport and supply to breaking-point.

I shall have been a clumsy chronicler indeed if, by now, the reader has failed to realise that our main, our almost insuperable, difficulties lay in the cold, the lack of transport, and the bitter barrenness of the land. These, and not their armies, were the lamas' strong and unfailing allies on whom they counted for our eventual discomfiture. Half their obstinacy was almost due to a curiosity in seeing how long we could stick out against obstacles which nobody, in the known history of the land, had tackled on a large scale.

But for us time was passing. The personnel on the line of communications behind us was, through sheer hardship and overwork, growing less and less efficient, and we could call on them for no greater effort. India, knowing our difficulties, was as patient as ever. But the Government at Westminster, sinking by measurable steps to an impending dissolution, began to show a nervousness under the pointed inquiries of foreign and hostile diplomacy, the acidity of which took strength from every fresh rumour that we were

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'hung up.' Had pressure and inquiries become unmanageable, such a political *dégringolade* might have followed as would have brought the subsequent era of Manchester and Limehouse two years nearer. Briefly, Westminster wished to know "What about it?" Nor was the inquiry unwelcome, since the answer, "We must go to Lhasa," brought the unexpected and welcome reply, "Proceed."

In addition, there was a kind of psychological push behind us. The expedition had with it three war correspondents. Besides these, there were members of the staff who drove a fluent and facile pen. As we entered the country, on tiptoe, the messages sent back to the Press were full of thrillingly mysterious anticipations. These developed into a succession of accounts of the wonders of the unknown land, as we got deeper into it, wherein the dictionary was sifted and winnowed for superlatives, and anyone who could devise a new phrase in mystic suggestiveness was pounced on and made to repeat it. The Press of India and England, and, through them, of much of the outside world, had been kept busy with letters and telegrams from the roof of the world. The excitement had reached its climax about a month before our half-way point, and showed the least little tendency to grow stale. By mid-August the Press was beginning to say, "Well, what are you going to do next?" and to ask for news of Lhasa itself. Not to have gone there would have involved anti-climax; and though this aspect was never, at the time, openly admitted, looking back on it now there seems little doubt that it was a strong factor in the permission we got to go forward.

The permission was welcome. But hardly had it been given when we of the expedition began to

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realise that we might possibly have been too confident in asking for it. In fact, we were up against time, and began to feel hurried. The expedition could not drag on for ever; every delay meant a further stiffening of the resistance against us; in addition, an unexpectedly mild past winter had allowed the uninterrupted use of the Jelap Pass for the very much smaller necessities of the initial advance. In the coming winter we could not count on the same good-fortune for traffic which had grown tenfold. The hour-glass-shaped problem of our line of communications—bulging supplies below, increasing force above, and the wasp-waist of that truly infernal Himalayan crossing which might at any moment close up and cut us off—lay unvoiced at the back of every argument in favour of hurry.

But how were we, with an equal distance to go, to duplicate the tedious strivings of the past nine months? The country ahead might be expected to be at least as difficult as that which lay behind us. It, and with it the road to Lhasa, was veiled in mystery; none of us had traversed it; no native of the country apparently knew—or, what amounted to the same thing, it was as much as his life was worth to tell us. There was only one point on which geographical knowledge was clear: somewhere astride our route we should find one of the major rivers of the world, the Tsangpo, which might (who knew?) eventually be the Yangtse; or might be the Salween, or the Mekong, or the Irrawaddy, or (and this was even more problematical) the Brahmaputra. Whichever it turned out to be, there would be no doubt of its size, and of the impossibility of bridging it in a land devoid of timber. How was it to be crossed?

It is doubtful whether any enterprise in modern

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history has been confronted with a greater collection of puzzles, or had more excellent reasons for avoiding foolhardiness by turning back. It is, on the other hand, doubtful whether any expedition had as leader a man of the forceful character of ours, or one richer in resource. Certainly never was there a leader in whom his following had blinder or more affectionate trust.

Amundsen (stout fellow, may the waters lie lightly on him) said once that adventures simply did not happen to well-managed expeditions. Had he said it in 1904 we might have taken heart of grace in our difficulties and have foreseen an easy solution, since never had an expedition been as well-managed as was ours. But the most venturesome among us would hardly have anticipated the decision to which Younghusband came.

To understand it one must cast back a little. In many of the fights with the Tibetans, the forces which we had overcome had met us in the open, but in the close proximity of one of the village oases. As each in turn took its beating, the survivors had retreated into the houses, whence they had been chivied and routed out till they had finally taken refuge in the main building of the village, in every case the solid and four-square monastery of the lamas. Here they usually fought it to a finish, involving their own dissolution and the pulverising of portions of the monastery by the gun-cotton wherewith, in the chronic absence of adequate artillery ammunition, the sappers frequently blew us a way in. We, therefore, were well acquainted with the normal interior economy of the monasteries; and in all of them we had found stores of the rough barley of the country, loose grain, unground, intractable, and uninviting, and of problematical food value; nor did we try

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to use it, since by then our own supplies were working smoothly and efficiently. Those whose business it was to make inquiry into the habits and customs of the Tibetans had elicited the fact that of each yearly exiguous harvest of the village one quarter went direct to the monastery, in invariable excess of the requirements of the monks, who hoarded it, selfishly oblivious of the fact that the village population was habitually on short commons.

To those who remembered that the grain found with mummies in ancient Egyptian tombs not only preserved its food value, but was said still to have power of germination, it was a foregone conclusion that barley kept in the natural all-the-year-round cold storage of Tibet would not have deteriorated; and it was on this grain that our leader determined that we all, from himself down to the last mule of the transport, should live till we got to Lhasa. On the grain which we had left behind us? Not so; *that* would have involved bringing it forward and repeating in a minor degree the delays of the lines of communication. But, he argued, here were we in a holy land, among monks and monasteries; we were advancing on the Holy of Holies; *a fortiori*, the closer we got to Lhasa the holier would the land become, and the more frequent the monks and monasteries. Did he know it? Was he told it? He did not know it, neither did anybody tell him. For all he knew, the country over which we were to advance might, in its unknown difficulty and desolation, be bare of any human thing. He simply took his courage in his hands and banked all on what, to him, was a sound hypothesis; nor did one of us for an instant question the wisdom of his decision. In the circumstances, a risk taken

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in the face of factors cumulatively unknown was as fine an act of courage as has been known in the records of frontier warfare.

In short, we, in sufficient force and equipment to make our arguments decisive, were to cut loose from our line of communications and to launch forth across the roof of the world, independent of help or support or of anyone to come to our assistance if things turned out wrong. Moses and the Children of Israel have been a commonplace to us from our childhood upwards; but, in similar circumstances, Younghusband seems to have been allowed to repose, unemphasised, in the books which record his doings. At least the Children of Israel grumbled at their leadership and their short commons; the Children of Israel, town-dwelling work-shy grousers at a simple job of work in bricks, *would*. But never was a more cheerfully confident body of men and beasts (the mules, I am sure, caught the infection) than that which stepped out from Gyantse into the northward wilderness on that August morning of 1904.

Fifteen hundred men, three thousand mules, every man and beast laden to ultimate carrying power with every necessity from a cartridge to a box of medical comforts. Saving only food, we were a marching Army and Navy Stores, and, on the single file track, we measured eight miles from advanced guard to rearguard.

For the track was there, obvious and unmistakable. Narrow, lumpy, a heartbreaking thing on which to march, it ran very early into a succession of deep valleys and gorges where there was no room for the traveller to lose himself. In the very dark you could have found your way along it if only by touching the rocks of its surface smooth-

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polished by the unshod hooves of countless generations of beasts of burden.

On the first evening our confidence in our leader had exact confirmation. At twelve convenient miles from our starting-point the valley opened out. There, in the middle, stood a small village by the river bank; and there, perched above it on the cliff side, the inevitable attendant monastery.

Down loads, off equipment, take shovels, sacks, and unladen mules. In five minutes a caterpillar of men and beasts was crawling up the rock face to the *gompa*. Nor had we even to fight for what we wanted. Many of us had expected to be forced to do so, and plans had been laid therefor; but, beyond lowering looks, no opposition met us. The Tibetans, it is true, concentrated for a final stand at the Kharo La Pass, where we were to meet them, but there is little doubt that their past experience of defeat prevented their wasting their strength on the minor defences which would have made our daily task far harder.

It would leave a gap in our understanding of the state of affairs were we not to digress for a moment and see the wherefore of the supplies on which we counted. Tibetan Buddhism has little in common with the teachings of the Master; it is, in fact, nothing but a preaching of universal devildom; not a vague and collective demonology, but with a specified and particularised devil appropriate to every place, action, and motive of the simplest daily life. Between the all-pervading aggressive demons and the simple and hard-living people who fear them, the lama places himself as the one and only shield.

The protection afforded is the vain repetition of endless and meaningless formulæ and the ob-

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servance of set ritual; further, these things are of no value in themselves, but only as prescribed by, and with the direct sanction of, a lama. The devil-scaring prayer-flags, the walls composed of stones inscribed with a mystic formula, the whirling prayer-wheels driven by hand, by water, even by wind—all are valueless except by the intervention of the monks. For all this protection full payment is exacted; not always, nor indeed often, in cash, but in the compulsory *corvée*, and the yearly contribution to the nearest monastery of one quarter of all produce, which keeps these self-indulgent parasites in the inertia which glowers from their sodden and soulless faces.

Whence originated the fiction that all this mumbo-jumbo business was devised to 'acquire merit' it would be hard to say. Fictions arise from nowhere, and once risen die hard; and this fiction has, so far, been the particular appanage of the debased and predatory lamaism which we found masquerading as Buddhism. It had its points, in that without it we should never have got to Lhasa, for each and every monastery contained in its underground chambers the accumulated grain contributions of the nearest village in amounts past belief. I, *moi qui vous parle*, have stood in the open doorway of an underground room and have held a lantern while men, armed with sacks and shovels, sank knee-deep in loose barley of which the packing action underfoot alone prevented their sinking up to the waist into it. Not once, but many times.

To show to what lengths this miserly hoarding could go, consider how, in one instance, the monks, having filled one of the underground rooms till it would hold no more, had built in the doorway with squared stone, had plastered the surface

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and, with elaborate care, had painted a fresco of their leading saint, Avalokitesvara, over the surface, surer protection than any lock or key in a land like Tibet. We had failed to find in the monastery as much as its size and importance would warrant, and were almost convinced by the improbable whines of the aldermanic abbot who swore that there was no more grain in the place, when suddenly I heard one of our *drabis*—a cheerful buccaneer with a nose for hidden stuff—calling, "Sahib, dekhiye sahib, *yih* kya mila!" I went along and found him pointing to where the rough plaster, which must have been years old, had dried and raised the slight outline of a doorway through the paint of the fresco. "Márun, sahib?" asked he gleefully. "*Ra*ther," says I. He whirled his pick, and great lumps of the plaster flaked off. After a while we got the stones loose, helped to some extent by Falstaff, whom, weeping in the background, we had enlisted as honorary member of the working party, and had made to do his whack in the labour. We cleared the débris, and out streamed a cascade of dust, mortar, and bushel on bushel of golden grain—ceiling high.

I took the abbot by the folds of meat which he called the nape of his neck. I am not ashamed to say it. I took him by the nape of his lubberly neck, drove him down on his knees, and r-rubbed his nose in it. Avalokitesvara, indeed!

In short, here, teeming in the monasteries, was a hierarchy of privileged parasites; outside, in the villages, the hard-working peasants toiled with might and main to wring a thin subsistence from every rood of grudging soil which they could irrigate in an all-too-short summer. They denied themselves every comfort and limited their families by the practice of polyandry, that the gross monks

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should want for nothing. The few children born are the utmost that the land can support. It is not too much to say that I, who stood in the doorway, watched my men shovelling into sacks what was the direct equivalent of unborn babies.

We, as a rule, paid for anything which we took from the villages. We paid, for instance, for sheep, of which more anon. But our very souls would have revolted at the idea of paying to the monks one penny for what they not only would never miss but for what, indeed, they should never have possessed. We finished with a positive affection for the virile, truthful, and (as we knew) hard-fighting villagers; but, to the end, not one of us could meet a lama in the path without the hand itching for something good and flexible, something flappish and whangable, wherewith to express an opinion.

"Acquiring merit?" Flat, systematic brigandage!

The sackfuls of grain, laden on mules and dumped in camp, were distributed to man and beast. Fine heartening stuff it was, and stuck to your ribs; full of vitamins, calories, nitrogen content, and other chemical superlatives—if only you could get at them. But here was hard grain, none the softer for the climate in which it grew and the many years of its storage, and nothing wherewith to grind it. Alexander, Xenophon *et hoc genus omne*, had at least their quern-stones; but the grinding appliances of any Tibetan village would hardly have produced flour for a platoon. Fuel, we had some; of dried yak-dung, etc., a good deal; the grains were parboiled, pounded between stones, worried about and all but stamped on; and they went down somehow. But *then* the circus began. The first incautious hearty meal

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by hungry men, and two hours afterwards . . . Ooooh ! . . . *WOW !* . . . The only members of the expedition who could have had any experience of hard grains were the Sikhs, and they knew the stuff only in the shape of the whole meal *atta* of the Punjab, in itself indigestible enough to those unused to it ; but the Gurkhas, rice-eaters always, took it bitter bad.

In twenty-four hours the hospital had issued its last scrap of Epsom salts, and the pills were running low. The doctors, alarmed at the prospect of the expedition entering Lhasa bent double and groaning, dashed about giving advice, the gist of which was to eat little and to chew that little thirty-two times (if memory serves) *more Gladstoni*, before swallowing.

The mules, as one might expect, added one more conjuring trick to their repertoire by wolfing the stuff in half-pound mouthfuls, and in being the better, the fatter, and the more frisky for it. Squeal ; kick your neighbour in the ribs ; raise nose, voice, and a forest of ears, and *ask for more !* Those almost incredible mules. . . .

Later, we learnt to forage the grain-stores and swop the contents back to the monks for an equivalent weight in *tsamba* barley-meal, in which the food value was largely mixed with grit, or with anything that the incessant wind chose to blow on to the open-air threshing floors ; " fine confused feeding." The tsamba had to be extracted from hiding-places. Similarly, the villagers gladly gave up the small quantity of tsamba they possessed for double or treble weight of grain ; thus we evened up matters between them and the monks whom they so blindly allowed to terrorise them. In the end, it was practically the mules alone who had barley *au naturel*, the men drawing

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meal and barley alternately. The meal we made into a porridge and, by the addition of more dried meal to the mess, made fairly portable but nauseous-looking cricket balls of the stuff. These balls were carried in the haversack and nibbled *en route*, the full value of the rib-binder then being got for the minimum of digestive trouble.

Then there were the sheep; thousands of them. We left Gyantse with a sizable herd; and this, somehow, increased instead of diminishing as we went along. Sheep are universal in Tibet; their wool is a fundamental necessity in the Arctic cold; their meat hangs in mummified carcasses, sometimes for years, before being eaten; on the southern frontiers they become beasts of burden in the salt and borax trade, each sheep carrying thirty pounds across the passes. How they were fed, or by whom, was a mystery. Ask the yak. But we drove a flock of thousands. Long before dawn the flock would be on the move, quite independent of protection, and driven by volunteers from the ranks. The hope, persisting to the last, was that the sheep would get to the next camping-ground before we did; a hope as invariably falsified. For, somewhere about mid-day, and always, seemingly, at the worst and narrowest part of the route, the advanced guard would come up with them; they, going one mile an hour, we three. Then, for what seemed like hours, men, horses, mules waded knee-deep in a maa-ing, baa-ing, reeking mass of obstinately obstructive wool. Sheep in a drove, when interfered with, move in headlong panic rushes; or stop dead, crowd together into an impenetrable lump, and face all ways at once; and these sheep were no exception to the rule. They added miles, in sheer fatigue, to our daily march, and we grew to hate the sight

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of them. When they got moving, hours before daylight, the volleys of baa-ing would wake the camp and keep it awake till legitimate 'réveillé.' The Tibetan sheep's baa-power is what you would expect where mother calls to young, or young to mother, in a land where, whether up-wind or down-wind, the gale sweeps sound from your lips as soon as uttered. The Tibetan sheep's utter brainlessness did not need the wealth of varied description it got at mid-day, from fifteen hundred leg-hampered men, to make it apparent. The Tibetan sheep's power of obstinately withstanding any attempt to hurry it was daily driven in on successive rear-guards who, dropping with exhaustion, shoo'd and hustled the last of their charges into camp hours after everyone else was fed and bedded.

The Tibetan sheep was, as it were, mutton. It was also, as it were, violin strings, and piano wire, and indiarubber, and leather, and what is left over when you have chewed (and chewed, and re-chewed, and finally and definitely thrown away) a piece of string. It added grey hairs to our heads, and subtracted years from our lives. It shortened our normally excellent tempers, and brought about ridiculous situations; the most ridiculous lives in the memory as the sight of a stately battery mule, tall, well-groomed, and all the taller for a 230-lb. topload of khaki-painted gun,—the tall mule in a narrow part of the track bogged to the hocks in a seething mass of struggling ovine brainlessness which maa'd and baa'd and maa'd again; and the mule still dignified, without a twitch to his ears or the beginnings of a lift to a sorely-tempted heel. Once more, and a dozen times a day, I take off my hat to the transport mule. But, with my hat in one hand and my stomach

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in the other, I sweep a deep and stately bow to the mule of the pack-artillery. Of a truth there is nothing quite like him in this world.

Why the Tibetans never descended on our unprotected mutton in the hours when it preceded our advanced guard and lagged miles behind our main body was always a mystery to us. But, looking back, it seems probable that the same reason held, in this case, as in their non-interference with our foraging in their monasteries; they were concentrating every man and gun for the defence of the Kharo La, that high pass to which we have already referred. Ideally defensible, determination would have made it impregnable.

Determination we had every right to expect of them. By every human law, there should have been one last huge and spectacular battle wherein the Tibetans, as a nation, would have risen up to bar our way to the Holy of Holies, dying in heaps in defence of their monks. Fact is, their *morale* was gone. Horde after fresh horde had been turned against us, the survivors of each, after bitter battle, to dissolve in fragments which, in the absence of any workable military system, could not be reassembled, but scattered far and wide carrying exaggerated tales of what they had been up against. The levies which tried to defend the Kharo La against us fought under the overhanging shadow of persistent past failures. Above all, they had been utterly deserted by the cowardly monks who should have been the first to lay down their lives in defence of their Sacred City. Individually brave, the Tibetan looks to his lamas for guidance and leadership in any circumstances; setting aside all question of the anathema of life-taking by a lama, the gross monks were the last people in the

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world to risk their skins. For, where an ideal to be upheld and fought for is concerned, none know better than the lamas of Tibet how many yards of tongue go to one cheek.

The fight at the Kharo La, therefore, had nothing but its almost incredible difficulty of terrain wherewith to puzzle us; and that with a grim and peremptory viciousness we waltzed though its defences, I ascribe to the concentrated dyspepsia born of barley-meal and the aforesaid mutton; tempers were at vanishing point, and we swept the Tibetans out of *sangar* and wall, cave and glacier-moraine, as we would have swept the Prussian Guard had they been there. In the next world war the storm troops will be battalions of dyspeptics selected from the conscripted nation; for weeks before zero hour we shall feed them on pounded barley and stringy mutton; and when they go over the top, nor man nor beast, wire nor heavy artillery, shall stand against them.

V.

We have been digressing. We found our expedition at the end of the first day's march, with every guess and prophecy of our leader fulfilled. Our trust in him hardly allowed room for surprise at the patness of the event and the increasing ease to our difficulties, for, day by day, just what he foresaw turned out to be the case. Monasteries, sometimes without but more often with small villages in close attendance, multiplied as we progressed. Not always, naturally, were they the exact distance apart that we wished to march. Indeed, on two occasions there was no monastery at all, and we lived on our margin of reserves.

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But presently they grew so thick that we could afford to skip one and go on to what we felt confident would be another.

Presently also (as a doctor once said to the writer, " the human body being a weird and wonderful thing ") we grew in a way accustomed to the tummy-twisting diet, and ceased to hate our meals in prospect. In a year's time, I am convinced, we might even have learnt to grow fat, as the mules very early grew fat, on the heavy nitrogenous stuff; for there is no doubt that the Tibetan, living in a land such as his, backed a winner when he concentrated on barley.

Of the fight at the Kharo La we have spoken. Of the crossing of the Tsangpo—that combination of the luck of good enterprises with the ineptitude of the Tibetans who abandoned to us the barges of their ferry—we will not speak. For it cost us the life of one, Bretherton, in whose hands had lain the working out of every tangled problem of transport and supply necessitated by the wise and courageous decisions of Younghusband.

Bretherton.

Kindly, courteous, infinitely adequate, the death of any three other officers of his rank in the expedition would have been, by comparison, a lesser loss to us. The gloom of the catastrophe still hung over us when, five days later, we turned a corner of the mountains and saw, far out on a wide plain, the gilded finials of the Dalai Lama's palace and the squat grey roofs of Lhasa.

Two hundred miles had we come from the halfway point; through mountain gorges, over open plains, across high passes, round the borders of unknown lakes, and across one of the major rivers of the world. Incidentally, we held the world's record for altitude in a successful battle; not

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flat, but up-ended between 16,400 and 19,000 feet. Every yard of our journey had been unknown, no yard of it mapped or described. Heel and toe at our best pace we had come, heads up and chests out and a straw between our teeth, and all at the bidding of one man who *knew* (may there be born to England more men with such knowledge!) that he could lead us successfully to our goal and that we would follow him; and that no man of us, in a hard and stony land, but would have done his utmost bidding if only to give him a moment's comfort.

VI.

In six weeks of patient persistence Younghusband worried a complete and comprehensive treaty out of the Tibetans. Their leaders, ecclesiastical and civil, fought him point by point. At every turn they were simply worn down by the firmness of a man of the very existence of whose type they had previously had no conception. Throughout it all, he never once had to threaten the destruction of Lhasa. Undoubtedly the power to do it lay in our hands; equally undoubtedly, the Tibetans knew it. But it speaks volumes for Younghusband —he, the very embodiment of a sahib's decent feeling when dealing with a people beaten to their knees—that the *ultima ratio regum* was never even suggested.

A few days later we started homewards, the treaty in our pocket.

The way home was easy. In a peculiar way, a force victorious finds things made light for it where the same force struggling to its destination is up against everything. It may have been harvest

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time, or it may have been the prestige of success, but all sorts of good things seemed to appear from nowhere; turnips, I remember, among other things.

When we rejoined the line of communications at Gyantse, Capua lost its place in history. For not only were the comparative luxuries of a soldier's normal diet awaiting us, but the accumulation of good things which had streamed steadily up to the head of the line all the time we were away also were there.

Our mess-cook's first effort, under the new conditions, sticks in the memory. He must have thought deeply before the inspiration of what was the most solid and stickjaw thing imaginable flashed across his brain to be fed to sahibs who, had he known it, had been day-dreaming for weeks past on jellies, beaten eggs, whipped cream, and other ethereal levities.

Bacon roly-poly!

Could one face a mouthful of it to-day?

But, in those golden days of our youth, with digestions hardened by what we had undergone, a full meal of the deadly stuff was followed only by dreams of fireflies where, three months before, we should have dreamt of dragons.

. . . . . .

Two days later we set out to make light of the downward journey. The old landmarks flicked by with an almost homey sensation as we cast the miles behind us. But the wisdom of our leader to brook no delay in advancing on Lhasa was apparent as we neared the passes. For forty-eight hours the approaching winter snowed the whole force up, solid; and we just struggled out as the north closed down behind us in leaden cloud and blizzard after blizzard.

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And there lay India, infinitely big and flat, infinitely clear in the rain-washed air of an approaching cold weather, a land of incredible distances as seen from the Himalayan divide.

And, there, too, this scribe saw Younghusband at the top of the pass, looking southward, with who could guess what of thankfulness in his clean and steadfast heart. There and then it was borne in on us that the reality of leadership lies not, as so many of us suppose, in subtle manœuvre or in brilliant battle, but in sheer dogged personality and the confident power of organisation; and when, in addition, the leader commands the faith and affection of every man of his following, what, indeed, shall withstand him?

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IX.

RETALIATION.

THERE is a small feeding-place, buried in Soho, where, on occasion, you may find gathered together those who have retired from the outer fringes of the Empire and have unbuckled the harness: just such gatherings of spasmodically reminiscent cronies as those who swopped yarns with the immortal Brigadier Gerard in that snug little pub in Toulouse. Here, one evening last winter, Gillespie, late Colonel of Gurkhas, told the tale that follows.

Omitting inverted commas, hear him tell it, inadequately though this scribe may have memorised it, and haltingly written it.

I.

Wali Mahomed Khan, Pathan, of the Achakzai clan which lies astride our Afghan Border area, was one of the finest specimens of natural manhood whom it has been my good fortune to know. We called him 'Wallu' for short, and I don't think half a dozen of us even knew what his full patronymic was.

Born and brought up, in the wild Pathan fashion, in the mountain country which lies between one

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of our large frontier headquarters and the Border itself, he never forgot how the first outstanding event in his life which led to such a mixture of events afterwards was when he left his wife in charge of the headman of the village and set out to make a better living in the *khassadárs*, the irregular tribal Levies with which we supplement our forces on the frontier. He has no history in the Levies up to the time when he got his first leave and returned to his home among the parched crags of the Khoják; but, with that return, things begin to move with rapidity. Briefly, he seems to have found the scattered fragments of the Seventh Commandment lying thickly on his doorstep, the wife cowering in a corner, and the erring *sardár*, who had heard of his imminent arrival, making a hole in the horizon.

What happened to the wife is not known, though a guess is permitted. What happened to the *sardár* transpires from what Wallu told us, years after, in one of his rare moments of expansion. Wallu took French leave and a 'borrowed' rifle from his Levy, and hunted the delinquent. For two years, uphill and down-dale of the wide Borderland, he hunted him, and finally into India itself, his main object being to head him off from taking refuge in Afghanistan; wherein he was successful, for at last he caught him up where he was working on the new Sukkur Barrage, in Sind, and where he had risen to the position of foreman of works. As Wallu describes it, "I found his hut, sahib. I watched it for a week, and then at midnight I crept to the door, entered, and stood at the foot of the *charpoy* where he slept. A small window stood at the head of the bed, and gave a little light. I waited a while, and then I took him by the foot and shook him

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gently. He awoke and sat up. I said, 'Gul Zamán, do you know me?' He sat and blinked, and said nothing. I cut downwards, so——" and Wallu made the expressive gesture from elbow to finger-tip with straightened palm, which all Pathans make. The sleeve, falling from the raised forearm, exposed the magnificent muscles; there was no need to tell that the stroke needed no repeating—" his head fell off sideways, and he remained sitting, spouting blood. I wiped my *tulwár* on the bedclothes and walked out into the night."

So far, so good: a perfectly normal story of the Borderland.

The sequel also follows normal Border traditions. Gul Zamán had a brother, one Turabáz Khan, whom we afterwards came to know as Tor Khan, for short; and Wallu found himself with the usual blood-feud on his hands. On Tor Khan (*vice* Gul Zamán, *obitus sine prole*) had fallen the headship of the village, and Wallu found himself in the minority of one and condemned to roam. Landless, without wife or chick, with nothing much of brains and only a great gaunt body at his command, he commenced his wanderings, his eye always skinned for the vengeance which he knew would pursue him in any place, at any time of day or night—relentless. He is rather vague about this part of his history; he seems not to be too proud of a period of frank vagabondage, though, even from this, merry incidents emerge. To wit, what he in the end frankly admitted to be his joining a jovial gang of moss-troopers who wrecked a goods train on one of the steeper gradients of the Bolán Pass, whence he brought away nothing more useful than a big bullet-hole in the right leg, the gift

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of the escort in the guard's van. He seems to have reverted to the Levies after that, for there is a record of a quarrel with the Jemadar, whom he dragged from his horse and pounded on the ground *after* getting that very useful sword-cut down his back, from neck to loins,—and here, a little shyly, he draws his shirt over his head and shows the great ragged weal, eighteen inches long, the blood from which must have made an unholy mess of the two of them as they fought on the shingle.

Thanks, probably, to never being in any one place for too long, and to having no regular habits, he escaped the attentions of Tor Khan, who never caught him bending; though there were ample indications that the blood-feud was not going to be allowed to come to a standstill. But, whatever the reality of the danger, it seems to have been at least temporarily scotched when Wallu, blowing in from nowhere, came boldly into the battalion office, asked for the C.O., and requested the job of *chowkidár*, or armed caretaker, to the target-house on the rifle-range outside the North Fort, the same standing in what, for discretion's sake, we will call the frontier station of Baldak.

As he stood there, upstanding and dignified, speaking as man to fellow-man across the Orderly Room table, I couldn't help admiring every inch of him. Barefoot, he stood well over six feet, and a little over-broad for true proportion; deep-chested. His arms hung from his shoulders in the loose and careless curves of the strong man. His great bony face and beaky nose, and that massive headpiece which, as I often found in later days, was a placid and unshakable rock, crowned a bull's neck hardly in keeping with hands and feet which showed that stamp of breed-

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ing to be found only in the best Pathans, whose outlines would have been a joy to Praxiteles. He answered my questions in a big level voice with a merry twitch at the end of it; and once only his vast cheek-bones wrinkled to a grin such as is rarely seen on a fellow-man in these days of hard thinking.

Wah! But here was a Man.

"Anybody know anything about him?"

"Yes, sir," from the Adjutant; "X. and Y." (two officers) "use him as *shikári* up in the hills, and say they'd trust him with anything."

Thus Wallu, armed with one of the battalion buckshot Martinis, found himself installed in the target-house on fifteen rupees a month, plus rations, and with little to do but keep the rifle-range appliances in order. This he did with the loving care which we afterwards found that he bestowed on any arm, or any appliance connected with fighting, so that even the target-paste came in for a share, and was of a smoothness and clearness unknown to the rather catchemalivo ways, in these matters, of Johnny Gurk. His realm measured a thousand yards by fifty; it was bounded at the far end by a stop-butt, of no great height, since the wide plains of Afghanistan lay just beyond, where a flying bullet is of no more concern than the song of the short-toed lark. His headquarters, near the Fort, were the brick-built target-house, whose walls had, for the slayer of Gul Zamán, the inestimable advantage of being bullet-proof. Here he dwelt, in complete peace and brotherly concord with the little Gurkhas of the garrison, their squat Mongolian faces never failing to break into a grin when gazing up at the cheery countenance of one who narrowly escaped the fate of becoming a regimental pet.

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II.

Some eighty miles north-west of one of our principal frontier headquarters, over a range of stark and craggy mountains, and out in the middle of the flat yellow desert beyond, lies the outpost, fortification, or cantonment of Baldak.

It lies astride the main camel-route into Southern Afghanistan, where the grim mountain passes of the northern Border fade out into open desert, and is wedged tightly up against the line of white-washed cairns, which, by our self-denying ordinance, spells 'thus far and no farther' to the English, but not to the Afghans.

It is roughly an oblong enclosure surrounded by barbed wire, containing a fort at the northern end and another at the southern, each manned by half a battalion of Gurkhas. Between the two lie the tangled purlieus of the bazaar—an entrepôt for the camel caravan trade from the north and beyond; and, in close proximity to it, the open cantonment, where stand the unfortified and unprotected bungalows of the battalion's white officers. The bazaar is a perfect thieves' kitchen of cut-throats. They drift in and out, secure in the knowledge of the British 'live and let live.' Here men go to earth and lie hidden when a tribal feud gets too hot, or when the crudities of Afghan punitive justice are reaching out for them; and—the law is unwritten—as long as they cause us no trouble, we do not trouble them.

Apart from the civil Kotwál and the native Political Agent, two local minor functionaries under the orders of the Political Officer at head-

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quarters, who are supposed to be responsible for the local tribesmen—and who at this time most certainly were not,—the Gurkha bazaar-guard keeps order. A strong party moving about with rifles? Not so. Reinforced by the power of the unwritten convention, the Gurkha bazaar-guard is one man, neat in close-fitting khaki, polished belt, and one and a half cwt. of side. He is armed with a walking-out cane, and is lord of all he surveys for the month of his spell of duty. True, the Babel knows that we could, were we so minded, wipe the whole place out in one day and cook our dinner on the ashes; but even that hardly gives backing to what I saw once—a long thin string of a hundred trail-worn laden camels conducted by wild tribesmen; and a little Gurkha as high as a pile of sixpences and the picture of boiling fury, standing in mid-road, waving his cane and damning the tall camel-men all to heaps for taking the wrong turning into the main street. The camels wound themselves up into a confused block while the tribesmen gradually took in what was meant; whereupon the whole cortège presently unwound itself, turned wearily about, and went back to the right turning. What? All right; I tell you I *saw* it happen.

So much for daylight. But after dark it is a different matter. The universal law of the Border is that, when darkness reigns, every man who owns a house gets inside it and shuts the door, *tight;* and he who has no house gets behind a rock. For then the terror that flieth by night has a nickel nose, or one of lead, or, all too frequently, one blunted at the tip and sawn so as to give those ghastly wounds which we associate with expanding bullets. Curfew? The Border

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makes its own curfew, and the quick shot takes the place of a challenge.

Seven miles off, on the Afghan side and astride the camel-route, stands the mediævally constructed but quite useful Afghan fortress of (let us say) Kadanai. Baldak and Kadanai face each other across flat desert, and have, officially, nothing whatever to say to one another, though each is keenly conscious of the presence of its opposite number, very much as are two dogs, of equal size and fighting weight, living on opposite sides of the same street.

There you have the cantonment of Baldak; and when I add that, in addition to the mixed crowd of those whom you might style interesting characters, but whom we, on the spot, called damned cut-throats, whom we had to cherish in our sandy bosom, the Afghan frontier stretched as an open line of whitewashed cairns across the desert a couple of hundred yards off—and the wire entanglement was, through lack of funds, no obstacle at all—you begin to see that the situation ran mainly on hope, or on a rather stiff and strained mutual respect, whichever way you prefer.

. . . . . .

The particular phase in the annals of Baldak with which we have to deal occurred when the cantonment became a gathering-place for a couple of divisions of all arms which took the field against Afghanistan in the 'war' of 1919. There was nothing much in it, except that our entire circus went out one morning to Kadanai, at that time the Afghan headquarters, and, with unnecessary noise and vehement H.E., blew it to bits. Thereafter, both sides sat down and looked at each other, three perfectly good Afghan armies in three separate camps across the way, ourselves

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in Baldak and the ruins of Kadanai, each side unable to leave its ground, because, had it done so, it would be advancing into an area of which its enemy held the water-supply. One incident only lightened the tedium. A young and impressionable flying officer, scouting over enemy headquarters, discovered at some distance in its rear the camp of the Commander and that of the outfit of ladies with whom he took the field. He discovered also one damsel, bonny as a rose-leaf and conspicuously interested in the machine and its occupant when flying low. Shortly afterwards he obtained from down-country a large two-pound box of chocolates, and once more flew to the enemy camp, bent on presenting his gift to the tantalising unknown.

There she was, as usual.

Now I am no aeronaut, but I believe that in those days our airmen went at about sixty miles an hour; anyhow, this fellow was travelling at a pace of knots, and the lady wasn't travelling anything in particular. He flew low and hard towards her, waving the box in the air with the cheery gesture which spells "Catch!" from China to Peru. As he dropped the box she made a lap in which to catch it.

She caught it right enough, poor thing. . . .

Next day a flag of truce came in from old Thingummy across the way, with an infuriated protest at our making war on women. It nearly drove the three Afghan armies into movement, and now serves its purpose in driving me back out of side-issues and into the main current of what I am trying to tell you; for it was just at this juncture that my bearer bolted and was seen no more.

Is there anyone in this world more helpless than the sahib without a servant?

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Now, the Border was never a popular spot with servants, and they usually had to be heavily bribed to come there at all. So that when I found myself servantless I was rather up against it. No question of sharing with anyone else: the Indian servant serves one man only, and him half-heartedly. The battalion being 'back in billets' at Baldak for the moment, the question became acute. Its discussion at mess that evening suddenly stimulated a brain-wave.

"Wallu sometimes does for us, in a rough way, when he takes us after *gadd* in the hills. Why not try him, sir?"

Instantly the merry notion bit. In a moment the mess orderly was doubling down to the lines. By the time the wine was on the table and post-prandial contentment reigned, up the drive leading to where our table was laid, for coolness, in the open, came striding Wallu, his powerful figure half as large again in its outline against the glowing western sky, his treasured Martini slung over his shoulder and his heterogeneous collection of rags swaying mightily in his long elastic strides. He came to the table and squatted on the ground beside the subalterns seated at the far end, and a hubbub of cheery chatter arose. As soon as anyone could get a word in edgeways, it was "Don't sit *bukh*-ing here, Wallu. The C.O. wants you."

Up rose Wallu, and swung up to our end.

"Stharé ma shé, sahib!" said he, with a waved hand, half salaam, half cheer-oh!

"Khwár ma shé, Wali Mahomed,"[1] I answered.

He squatted once more, coughed rather self-consciously, blew his nose (quite neatly) in his

[1] "May you never be tired!" answered by "May you never be poor!"

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fingers, laid his rifle across his knees, and awaited my pleasure.

You would say at this point that we had forgotten to offer him a drink. Quite wrong. Wallu, like all the best Muslims, not only did not touch alcohol, but plainly loathed the stink of the heady stuff. Nor would he soil his great leathery hillman's lungs with tobacco smoke. The conversation therefore proceeded directly.

"My bearer has vanished, and I can't get another. Will you take it on?"

The question had to be repeated before the slow ripples of dawning comprehension grew into the wrinkles of a wide and embarrassed grin. "What, *me?* Take on *sirdar* in the Karnél Sahib's household? What do *I* know of house service?"—and the embarrassment slowly hardened to a queer hostility. For a moment the mind's eye visualised a large goshawk being asked to take on the job of cleaning out the canary's cage.

He dug his toes in. Sheer obstinacy, reinforced by a look round the table at his skinny down-country co-religionists who, flitting so quick and silent-footed about the table, drew their white coat-skirts away from contact with him as they passed, but who, in their mean souls, were deadly afraid of him.

"*Come* on, Wallu. *Be* a man. Take it on. You'll get twice the pay you're getting, and the *izzat* of being C.O.'s bearer"—thus from the subalterns at the end of the table, his close friends, whom he trusted. That at last made him feel more homey. He sighed. "It's an order, I suppose. When do I begin?"

Next morning he turned up at the bungalow, where, washed and shaved and fitted out by the regimental tailor in the resplendent muslins

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and velvet of a Pathan of the upper classes, he slowly and reluctantly learnt the job of indoor service. From first to last he hated it all—all, that is to say, except the job of bossing the other servants and that of cleaning the shikár rifles and guns. He was never tired of the wonders of the telescopic sights and other gadgets, and loved the heartening feel of the heavy blued metal and the sharp snick of good mechanism—his long, thin, aristocratic fingers busy with oil-rag and cleaning-rod, with lock and bolt and barrel, till they got that indefinable dull glow which speaks of warm steel in harmony with its owner. And when, after an hour of it, he could find nothing more to do to a rifle, sitting and nursing it across his knees he would look out with distant and contented gaze over the desert, and sing a little crooning tune to himself.

. . . . . .

The Afghan 'war' of 1919 fizzled out rather than ceased. Dyer, down at Amritsar, had quelled the insurrection in the Punjab, and a mixed collection of sedentary busybodies was sitting in judgment on his actions. The untidy raggedness of the commissioned ranks was being sorted into something like pre-war shape by the ruthless axeing which acted as a wholesome purge to the Indian Army; and what should have been a restful ending to a perfectly good period of five years' world-war strain, developed into a housemaid's job of broom and dustpan. Anti-climax, and a mixed time for a C.O. Kadanai had been patched together and handed back to its former owners, who installed as Governor a *persona* politically *non grata*, a minor official who had emerged rather rumpled from a palace plot in Kabul and had been exiled to this first-cousin-to-

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Jehannum, accompanied by a disgruntled and showy Persian wife with expensive tastes.

The year was on the turn, and the hot weather approaching. We always knew when the turn of the year was on us by the uprising of the 'sand-devils,' which would last steadily through the remainder of the hot weather. A sand-devil is a whirlwind which, generally on the stillest days, gets up from nowhere and travels four or five miles before dismembering and whoofing off into nothingness. It consists of a strictly localised vortex, like an inverted cone, and anything up to two hundred feet in height. It travels slowly across the desert, rotating with incredible speed on its own axis, and gathering up anything loose which may lie in its path—tents, blankets, even cooking-pots,—whirling them to the top, where they spin, helpless, unable to come down till the devil has blown himself out. The devil himself is hot desert sand, and should you get in his path you must hang on tight to something firm lest you and your clothing join the mixed exhibits upstairs; you shut your eyes and try to hold your breath as the roaring darkness envelops you; you are then conscious of the crowning and quite inexplicable devilry—the overpowering and nauseating smell of almost solid human fug. Where on earth the devil picks up this last peculiarity has always defeated me, since he blows in from the untainted desert and is composed of wholesome sand; but all the crowded tenements of all the fetid slums of Benares, packed together, could hardly equal it; the breath of the very Pit. These devils sweep through cantonments about twenty times a day, and, as we have noted, their arrival coincides with the opening of the hot weather.

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The lady of the party here saw fit to join the scheme of things. When all other right-minded memsahibs were fleeing homewards before the advancing heat, this one decided to terminate a five years' war separation, and to land in Bombay with a complete and extensive fit-out for home-making; knowing nothing, and caring less, about the—to say the least of it—peculiar conditions of the Frontier. Stop her? Might as well try to stop a Bandersnatch. So, flinging prudence to the winds, I made a rapid dive for Bombay to welcome the caravan, leaving the bungalow all-standing in the capable charge of Wallu.

We dumped the kit with the Bombay agents, and took the first two months' leave in five strenuous years—trekking about, deliberately shunning a permanent address lest official business should pursue, and revelling in the historical antiquities of India's famous places: the sight-seeing which we, living in the midst of these wonders, never seemed previously to have been able to achieve. Another story altogether; no place for it here. At the end of the time we gathered up the mountainous kit, wired our impending arrival to Baldak, and set out to rejoin.

The warmth of the welcome prepared, when at last we drove in through the wire, dispelled most of the memsahib's uneasiness, which had been steadily growing as the lush down-country landscapes changed to scanty vegetation, bareness, and finally, stark desert. Foremost was Wallu. Forgetting the status of master and man—never, indeed, very obvious between us—he shot out his great paw and gripped mine. "Stharé ma shé, sahib!" he shouted; "jóriye? khush-hálye? mazbútye?"—while he pump-handled my hand in both of his, in rhythm with his greeting,

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laughing all over his face and half-way down his neck like a great schoolboy. And then finally, reassured, "Shukr de!"—*that's* all right, then—and turned enthusiastically to the mountains of kit.

"Hi, Wallu, come here. Come and be introduced to the memsahib!"

He turned about and took a pace forward; and the great body of a man, bunged up with wounds and healthy sin and the gorgeous life of the open Border, stood like a self-conscious child caught stealing jam; his head hanging, his hands behind his back, scratching the heel of one bare foot with the toes of the other. For all his deep copper-colour, I'll swear he was blushing.

The little scrap of a thing gazed up in whimsical amusement at his towering bulk—she who could have stood with her two feet on the palm of his hand while he raised her, erect, to shoulder height—and, friendly but properly ceremonious, "Salaam, Wali Mahomed Khan, Achakzai," said she.

"Salaam aleikum," whispered the great gawk, and scrabbled in the sand with his bare toe.

Silence.

Then, mass of confusion though he was, and hating it all, he pulled himself up as straight as a ramrod and made her just such a bow as Essex might have made to Queen Bess.

"Khush ámada éd!" said he in clear and courtly welcome.

And fled.

III.

The bare elements of furniture had been got into the bungalow against our arrival, the dry bones to which the contents of the packing-cases,

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arriving a week later, were to give substance and life. For carpets, there was all the store of Persia, Turkestan, and Bokhara on which to draw, clean from fresh-opened camel bales down at the caravanserai. Meanwhile would we mind pigging it for a day or so? Thus our *locum tenens*, the Second-in-Command, who came in for ten minutes and a drink in the back office. In the first half-minute whisky was forgotten and pipes went out, while, in the fewest words which would compass the wide ramifications of a complex subject, he laid bare the sudden change in every aspect of the local Border problems which had taken place during the two months of my absence.

The subject needs a little prefacing if we are to understand how, as a matter of habit, sahibs and their families had, up to this time, been able to live openly and unprotected in cantonment bungalows at a distance from barracks or from any kind of military guard—safe in the knowledge that the rough chivalry of the clans would confine warfare to the crags and valleys of the traditional fighting grounds; and how the changing spirit of the old Border warfare had, all at once, made this habit a definite and dangerous back number.

Listen now while I attempt to set out a matter not easily described nor understood in this England of ours—a thing full of anomalies and contradictions, but the very bone of the bone to us who lived and worked in the land.

To begin with, Border warfare as we knew it best had absolutely no ill-feeling in it. It was a war of hard-trained bodies, each against the other; a war of keen eyesight and straight shooting; a war of perpetual vigilance and of quick wits, where the man in the valley knew that at no time during daylight was he free from the hidden eyes

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which, from the hills above, watched his every movement; and should he grow careless, or slacken off, or, worst of all, indulge in any *habit* when living, moving, or fighting, then was his head a gift to his enemy. Success or disaster came with equally unexpected suddenness: a rearguard surprised and bunched together in difficult ground; a group of tribesmen caught in a cunning trap of their own devising; an ugly rush with knives on a camp at midnight, when the attackers went clean through wire, abattis, tents, mule-lines, and out the other side before you had grasped that they were there, leaving red ruin in their trail; or, the same tribesmen lying out and sniping the camp in the darkness, and the scattered flashes growing inexplicably fewer till the *chapáo* party of barefoot little Gurkhas came in again through the picket-line, their kukris red with the blood of the snipers stalked and slain in silence. Through it all, the marksmanship at long range through the clear and dry desert air of the gaunt mountains, the steady hand, and the clever judging of distance. And if they did cut up our dead and wounded, very rarely left out for them to cut, well, did not we burn their villages and ring-bark their few and precious apricot and mulberry-trees —though making very sure that the village was empty before we burned it? And if they had a rather *macabre* taste for rifling our fresh-made graves and turning the pitiful contents out to the vultures, didn't we, not seldom, bury in a grave a dummy in a blanket, containing gun-cotton slabs not a few, and tricky contact-wires, whereby the gravediggers flew to Paradise, their limbs not all together but singly and one by one?

Each war was a war with the gloves off as long as it lasted, where brain and eye, hand and body,

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all worked together at the top of their form; and, when it was all over, no rancour, no ill-feeling. Orakzai or Afridi, Mohmand or Achakzai, you could meet any of the many clansmen in Peshawar Bazaar, in Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan, or Quetta, each with a useful rifle and a bandolierful of the latest and best smokeless, and you could pass the time of day to each, openly and with a grin. Each and all would, occasion serving, gladly cut your throat; but he wouldn't be rude to you.

First and last, there were no grudges in it, and I think the core of the matter lay in the fact that we never made war on one another's non-combatants. It was good rough chivalry such as the old class of sahib loved well, carrying self-denying ordinances on both sides, which neither we nor the tribesmen ever transgressed.

Then came 1914, and the Great War. The sahibs who had learnt the Border so long and so patiently were scattered to Flanders, to Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, East Africa—anywhere where the new war called them, and their hill troops with them. Very, very few survived, so few that never can they leaven the new generation. It is difficult to describe adequately the irreparable loss. Only we, who have lived in both periods, know the deprivation in the loss of that wonderful knight-errantry which not only made our frontier wars such a grim delight, but which, for nearly a century, added definitely to the clean ideals of English youth.

In 1920, when England was settling comfortably into peace, the Borderlands blazed out into open rebellion, and all sorts were sent against them—all, that is, but those who knew the trade and its traditions. Each new brigade inevitably came to grief, and the clans armed themselves, as never

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had they armed themselves before, with the rifles of the slain. A crisis supervened, and the alternative lay between an irresistible uprising through the length and breadth of the Frontier, or turning against the tribes the methods of modern warfare and the new tricks learnt from the Hun.

Perforce, our folk dropped explosives on them from the sky; dropped incendiary bombs on their villages whence their women and children had not had time to escape; set up long-range heavy howitzers and shelled their village areas with six-inch high-explosive shells, which soared over the intervening mountain ranges in their blind flight, and dropped crashing on to crop lands where men and women worked; we machine-gunned them from aeroplanes; every unchivalrous trick we used against them—everything except gas.

Our people succeeded—after a fashion—and, even then, incompletely. But it was a poor success that left an embittered and vindictive feeling behind it—where tales of mangled non-combatants grew no less in the telling. I am convinced that it was directly and solely due to this new and vengeful feeling that the slow-growing indignation of the clans presently blazed out into the Kohát murders and the kidnappings from cantonments, the undefended bungalows of which had till then been respected by the tribesmen. It made Peshawar, Bannu, and Frontier stations farther afield no place for an Englishwoman except in the near neighbourhood of barracks. Had the Hun but known it, he, in teaching us the mechanism of unmanly destruction, dealt us a deadlier blow than ever he did by bombing and poisoning us; for he destroyed the old large-heartedness of the Border-land. Till now the last of the old knight-errants are the gaunt and tatterdemalion hillmen

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who, in this year of 1929, have waged such bitter and successful war against the mongrel internationalism and modernisation of the old Afghanistan.

We, of the old Border, hated it all, but were powerless in the face of facts; we, who could feel as did Chandos—or was it Bayard, *sans peur et sans reproche?* or du Guesclin? I dunno; some splendid old fighting man, anyhow, who hanged on sight every arquebusier he met, for the use of that villainous saltpetre which was slowly destroying the knighthood of Christendom. The measure of our bitter sorrow is the measure of our love for the old things clean and of good report; and now they are dead—dead and gone—and nothing on earth can bring them to life again.

So the rankling grudge had drifted south to us of the Achakzai territory. But the thing which had given pith and point to the new rancour, so far as we were concerned, and which subjected us to what eventually came to be a series of vindictive retaliations, was, I am certain, the unfortunate incident in which the airman and the box of chocolates figured so prominently—and yet so innocently.

So now we understood the tale which the Second-in-Command told, while the memsahib in another room was sluicing off the mixed desert which had invaded her, all over.

From the first he made no secret of the fact that, for the last two months, he had been up against it. Fine soldier though he was, he yet knew nothing of the Frontier. He had been transferred from a down-country regiment in the reshufflings which, at the end of 1919, filled the depleted commissioned ranks of those battalions which had made a habit of being in the thick of it all. He had never seen rock or sand or hawk-faced clansman before the

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time of his joining us; he differed, indeed, from the old type of Border officer who knew how to keep his temper and never made war in driblets. Briefly, there was something like open feud between the garrison and the clans, and the trouble was growing; an embittered state of affairs in which we held the undoubted mastery by day, but the tribesmen made things almost impossible for us by night; the reprisals growing more acute as each side chalked up one to spot, or one to plain, in fairly evenly balanced sequence. It was all right for the garrisons in the forts; but the bungalow area, accepted hitherto as neutral ground by the tribal code, was—as it had always been—out in the blue. As I have tried to describe.

Failing conclusions with the forts, the clansmen had fixed on the bungalows. The thin end of the wedge consisted of petty thefts. Of these no notice was taken. The thefts grew greater in volume and in frequency, property being hard to safeguard in houses built of unburnt brick and furnished with doors and windows from the woodwork of which, under the ravages of dry heat and white ants, all life and resistance had long departed. The Barrack Department had no money for repairs or replacements; doors hung insecurely on stout hinges the screws of which failed to bite; locks consisted of the usual chain and staple, anchored together by a heavy padlock, but easily wrenched asunder with the two-foot-long marlinspike which is the usual Border equivalent of a jemmy. This inserted point foremost in the hasp, a slow turn of the wrist is given, and—pf!—chain and staple softly and suddenly vanish away, after the manner of Boojums. When to this is added the fact that Border thieves have been known to lift a sleeping sahib by the four corners of his

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blankets, deposit him, still sleeping, on the floor, fold up his camp bed, and go off with it; or, more credible because more often done, lift a tent by its fly-ropes and leave the sahib to continue his sleep *en plein air* till the rising sun shines on him and wakes him; when they have a trick with a horse which will allow of their stealing him from his stable and taking him away, treading as softly as his captors; when all this, I say, is considered, there is credence in the reputed fact that Pathan thieves have that sixth sense which they share with cats and which allows of their doing the most incredible things in pitch darkness—a sense which surpasses and, for a time, seems to replace sight, smell, touch, or hearing.

There had been a series of these burglaries or raids; and, in every case, the thieves had got clean away with the loot, out of cantonments, through the wire, and, by a few steps, over the Border. Nobody knew, or nobody would tell, whose hand was in it, though persistent rumour had it that the Governor's expensive *khánum* in Kadanai Fort, over the way, was furnishing her quarters more in accord with her notions of good taste than her husband's pay would allow, and was gradually acquiring all our best possessions.

So much for the Second-in-Command, who confessed that he found the situation unmanageable; and what did I propose to do?

Sit down for a good long think? Or lose my wool and do something foolish? Not a bit. Knowledge of Pathan psychology discounted what were, after all, only pinpricks; these small irritations, it was obvious, were only a curtain-raiser; the really important features would develop later. But, meanwhile, there was no good reason for allowing them to continue. Questioned, had there been any

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shooting? The sentries at the Forts had been told to fire without challenging. Had they been given buckshot-Martinis and told to reserve their fire till they could shoot to kill? No; apparently not. (H'm; so the Pathans had been sticking to the time-honoured sequence of sniffing round the edge of trouble and seeing how far they could upset our tempers and our judgment before going on to the real business; the diagnosis was easy.) Any sahibs done any shooting? No; in each case the mischief had only been discovered at daylight.

Next morning I sent for the Civil Kotwál, and explained that this sort of thing had got to stop, one-time.

"Fidáyat shávam!" with a deprecating politeness; "may I be your sacrifice." Translated, it meant bide a wee; or, the matter is out of our hands,—whichever way you like to take it.

Anyhow, we turned to other things; and, whether *post hoc* or *propter hoc*, the raids ceased. Personally, I was inclined to think that the tribes were waiting to see if the returned incumbent would do anything sudden and awkward; and were marking time meanwhile. While I, thinking things over, and seeing clearly the directions which events were taking—though hand-tied both by custom and by order till the other side made the first move—blessed my stars for the day, and the brain-wave of the day, which brought Wallu, sturdiest of henchmen, within the scope of my domestic arrangements. In what was coming to us all, little time would there be for my own concerns and for those closely dependent on me; and on him, great lumbering mass of laughing courage, would devolve . . .

H'm.

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Anyhow, of how we came to rely on him, and of the indispensable part he played in all that followed, let me—risking discursiveness—tell exactly as it happened. Since one thing led to another, it is difficult to know how to shorten it.

. . . . . .

The household kit from England arrived a few days later. In my absence at work, the lion's share of the job fell on Wallu, who was in his element, heaving bulk and weight about with a merry sweating impartiality. "Here, give a holt, you!" and a heave all together, and in the stuff would rumble and bump—packing-cases, barrels, trunks, and what-not—into the verandah, which was soon knee-deep in straw, shavings, and brown paper.

When once the gear was in, and things growing ship-shape, the household duties had to be brought into some sort of ordered sequence. The minor servants fell into their appointed grooves at once. But Wallu was the problem. Far from clumsy, yet absolutely untrained, it was obvious very early on that he was impossible as an indoor servant in a memsahib's ménage. His bulk alone was against him. He dwarfed everything within sight, and towered head and shoulders above the others, on whom he looked down both literally and figuratively. The memsahib had that in her eye which verged on a sentence of dismissal; but the sahib had in his eye something more in response, which showed that the splendid old rough-diamond was going to stay at any cost, house-trained or not; and the memsahib's tact saved the situation. We would invent a status for him, with the rank—devised for the occasion—of 'major-domo.' He, in all his glory of towering muslins and gold embroidery, should be taught to stand in the ver-

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andah with a silver salver, take the cards of the callers, and show them in. The drill was simple, though to Wallu it was as irksome as harness to a zebra. The first day, when the Second-in-Command and the two captains called, all went well, though Wallu's hearty "Come along in!" savoured more of the owner of the show than of its retainer. He accompanied the callers into the tiny drawing-room, where the memsahib received them; stood there, to the imminent danger of tea-tables, what-nots, and other flimsinesses, and prepared to take a share in the conversation till shoo'd out by the diminutive lady.

Next day the subalterns arrived. Wallu spotted them from the verandah, gave a whoop of joy, and strode eagerly down the drive to meet them. An hour later they, in their glad-rags, were still sitting on the bench under the mulberry, used as a rule by the orderlies, in animated conversation with the new Major-domo about some shikár ploy, past or impending, the why and the wherefore of their coming clean forgotten; what time the *mem* waited in an empty drawing-room till the standard calling-hour had long passed, and then drifted in to lunch not a little puzzled at the absence of the expected visitors.

That was the end of the major-domo stunt. No other job seemed suitable to the wild Pathan. The lady refused to give him any job which involved tidying or handling breakables. "My dear, he'd crunch them all to bits in those great hands of his." Wherein she was wrong. I could have told her of the marvellous quickness and neatness of touch which the colossus shared with other really strong men. Anyhow, he was banished to the male end of the house, where he drifted about as before, doing some good and no harm—

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the good being the wholesome satisfaction which another man got when, thirsty, sand-smitten, and exhausted, he came in at evening and met the great calm bulk in the dressing-room, or heaving great *ghurrahs* of tub-water about in the bathroom, or standing over the shifty syce who weighed out the ration for the horses' evening feed. He came as a breath of clean desert air whenever you met him, did Wallu; and to no one so much as to the tired man. "Stharé ma shé"—hardly was there need for him to say it!

He avoided the memsahib. Gradually, unobtrusively, and quite courteously, he refused to have anything to do with that part of the house. I think he had all a Pathan's dislike for womenkind lying about loose; a definite impatience, probably bred into him by generations of ancestors who, daily carrying their lives in their hands, needed a clear deck on which to mind their dangerous business, and kept their womenfolk shut safely away. He was alacrity itself when sent on a job; but he generally managed not to be there when she wanted him. Looking back on it now, I realise that Wallu was that very rare and very lovable thing, an undiluted and wholly sincere man's man.

IV.

It was somewhere about this time that the trouble with the tribesmen of the place recommenced. One night, the last-joined subaltern lost his entire fit-out of saddlery. It was Sowter's best stuff, and some kind uncle must have been generous to him: a clean sweep, right down to the hoof-pick, and even the stable-collar stripped from the horse, which, however, was not taken.

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He lost his temper, vowed to pot the next man whom he saw moving at night, and had six rounds of the best with his revolver at an indeterminate shadow at the bottom of the compound a night afterwards. Two nights later he woke with a sudden burning pain through his leg and the sound of an explosion in his ears, sniped neatly from behind the low compound wall as he lay on his camp-bed in the open, where each officer slept, for coolness. We patched him up and sent him, under escort, in to headquarters to heal.

Ve-ry well, says I; if you *must* carry it to extremes and pot sleeping sahibs, you shall have it! Forthwith the order went out that anyone found moving after dark, and not carrying a lighted hurricane-lantern, would be neither stopped nor challenged, but forthwith shot. The native Political Agent was called up and notified; a shrug of the shoulders; "Balé," and a salaam; and off he loafed, every inch of his insolent backview proclaiming "no business of mine, of course; but two can play at *that* game." I nearly called him back, to say that the edict *included* all Government servants, of whatever rank, and of both colours. Damn the blighter! He knew more about the state of affairs than he cared to tell; I wondered whether he knew that the Sardàr of Kadanai was, at that moment, as we expected, peacocking round with a brand-new Sowter saddle between himself and his scrawny mount.

Two nights went by, and nothing happened. The third night, one of unusually dense darkness, bang! ba-ba-bang! ba-bang!!—rapid fire from somewhere near the North Fort. The field-telephone answered inquiry with the information that "they'd got somebody." So they had. Daylight revealed an old and nearly toothless man, a small

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boy, and a donkey-load of mixed wares, who had crept in through the boundary pillars on a mild kind of smuggling enterprise, to avoid the octroi post by day. Most unfortunate. It seemed about as heartless a thing as could have been done. But there it was; the weakness of the position lay in the fact that in the midst of declared inter-state peace, we were at local war; and, I ask you, *how* was one to notify local war regulations, however precautionary, to scattered tribesmen on the other side of an open frontier line?

Anyhow, we could only hope that it would not happen again.

Promptly came the answer. During mess, the uproar of a rifle-shot at close quarters, a splintering of window-glass, and a scattering of plaster on the opposite wall, made a sudden and simultaneous interruption to the general conversation. Nobody hurt. But, a few hours later, as though to add insult to injury, the only pair of bullocks which drew the iron conservancy-cart—an indispensable if malodorous adjunct to all cantonments—was discovered to be missing. Their hoof-tracks led to the frontier line, and passed on into the blue.

And who, or what, was to draw our cart?

Really, you know, when I realised that the bazaar, when it heard of our loss, must have rolled in convulsions of rib-racking laughter (the full details, by the way, are omitted), I could hardly repress a giggle myself.

Here or hereabouts it was borne in on me that a lady, interposed between lamps and open windows and verandah, was almost too much of a target. In those days the Kohát murders were still to come; but it was obvious that the old sanctions were going or gone; that dirty work was gradually creeping in to swamp the old fair-play, and that

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all the clean romance of Border fighting was weakening; so that, by evening, heavy curtains had taken the place of the bonny muslins. If they must snipe, at least they should snipe blind. Furthermore, Wallu, divested of gorgeous trappings and once more back in his dingy and nondescript garments, was, at his own request, on the prowl with the second-best Mauser-Rigby. It was at about this point that he threw off the depression of house-service and became his own joyous man once more. This, after all, was a thing he could understand. No slinking about behind walls or round corners. He moved as silently as a cat, but with head up and chest out and that marvellous sixth sense of all Pathans tuned up till it twanged inside his soul like a harp-string. If ever the old blighter said his prayers, which I doubt, he must have stroked the barrel and butt of the Mauser, on those still and wonderful starry nights, and thanked his God for the very joy of life.

He needed, indeed, to walk warily, and to know when to shoot and when not. For by this time we had begun to take measures ourselves. The garrisons of the two forts were insufficient to provide standing guards—in addition to their other duties—on each and every bungalow, the mess, the dâk-bungalow, the military works godown, and all the rest. Had some been guarded and others not, the unguarded ones would have been a cockshy to the prowler, and it would have been unfair. So we had to rely on moving patrols, a poor substitute, but apparently better than nothing. Theirs was the job of prowling round cantonments with buckshot Martinis in the hope of catching the lurking sniper or the silent-footed thief. Counsels, alas! of perfection. Unless he knows, by rifle-flash or other sign, where to look for him, how may

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a man on the move hope to find a lurker, still as a mouse and indistinguishable from his background? The patrols, again, had to be only a few men. A group would have been a gift; nor could more than one patrol be on the move at any one time, lest two patrols should meet in the dark and fratricide ensue.

The situation was worrying to a degree. With cantonments turned into an open battleground from dusk to dawn, none of us could sleep outside his house. We did not sit up, teeth all a-chatter. We slept as tired men sleep; but the business of getting to sleep inside an overheated bungalow in the infernal after-dark temperature of a desert summer shortened the temper of each of us for the next day's work, and things began to get unsatisfactory. It was about this time that somebody—not, however, myself—suggested tentatively to the lady of the station that she would be happier in the comparative safety and coolth of headquarters. The suggester didn't try it twice. In spite of the fact that if ever she hears I said it my name will be mud, I here and now register my solemn belief that, on the whole, she was rather enjoying it all!

. . . . . .

Real grim trouble now began to descend on us. I am never tired of saying that we were most unfairly handicapped—and, with an open frontier which we were debarred from crossing, but which was treated as non-existent by the tribesmen, and a bazaar which we were unable, through Civil regulations, to sort thoroughly, were powerless to fix the guilt on anybody unless we caught him red-handed. So the score began to mount up against us. A Gurkha orderly, lying up in the long grass of his sahib's compound on the chance

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of getting someone, was half blown to bits by an explosive bullet. The patrols were incessantly being sniped, and twice it was our job to bring in badly wounded men; nor was there ever sign or glimpse of the snipers bar the sudden yellow flash of the shot and, the spot being marked down and rushed, no trace of the sniper. Every now and again the programme would be varied by lootings. Once the entire kitchen fit-out of the dâk-bungalow vanished; once the flagstaff in front of the mess, sawn almost through in the night, descended with deadly effect on the orderly whose job it was to run the ensign up at dawn—a piece of sheer mischievous devilry. The regimental servants, down-country Mahomedans of the poorer-spirited type, got restive and threatened to bolt. My pair of one-rat-power Goanese, imported at much expense and trouble from down-country, came with telegrams in their hands announcing simultaneous deaths of fathers and mothers, requiring their presence urgently in Goa. Yet, as I say, by day you wouldn't have known that anything whatever was wrong, and everything, down to the single unarmed bazaar-guard, functioned smoothly and normally.

Now, it is not easy to explain it clearly, but the fact remains that there was no remedy except such remedies as we ourselves could apply. It would have been useless, nor would it have been within our dignity, to squeal to headquarters. On the Border you are expected to run your own show and never—if it can possibly be avoided—run crying to mother. In the old days, with the old type of sweaty, shirt-sleeved, pipe-sucking staff officer of the Frontier, we could, without loss of caste, have gone up to H.Q. and talked it over. The result would have been strictly unofficial,

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but very unpleasant, pressure put upon the Politicals, and some, probably quite guiltless, headman of Pathans would have been held responsible, in person and in property, that the nuisance stopped, suddenly and definitely. But though he is, thank Heaven, back with us again at long last, in those days the old type of staff officer had gone aloft on the wings of gas, H.E., and other sudden departures from the normal; and his place had been taken by a stop-gap swarm of very junior and strictly temporary ignoramuses, who barely knew the language of the people with whom they dealt, and who, in the face of anything like an emergency, were absolutely useless.

Fact is, we were the victims of circumstances; the altered circumstances of the Border, the altered methods of the New Army. We were caught in the tumbled turn of the tide, where the waters ran all ways at once and things had not settled into any one particular direction. So we just had to makee-do, and hang on in silence; and, whatever else happened, neither to panic nor show the tribes that they were worrying us. Not for coined gold would we have admitted to a crowd of murderous fly-by-nights that they were either interfering with our peace of mind or doing anything to take us out of our normal stride. *That*, at least, was not the way to hold the Border.

But each consecutive score-up against us made the next score easier and more probable. Once, for a while, we got a breathing-space. We managed to catch one of the snipers red-handed. He put up a whirling struggle for it, but the Gurks hung on grimly and in silence, and presently we had him trussed. We had been at infinite pains to catch one of them alive and get information out of him; so, treating him with the utmost impressiveness

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to be got from mystery, we marched him, bound, the five marches into headquarters, where we handed him over, *not* to the Politicals, nor to our own H.Q., by any means (they would merely have given him a lengthy trial and a term in prison), but with a strictly unofficial note to our old friend Buchanan of the Police, whose name was a terror throughout the Border where he had already put in nearly thirty years' service. The sequel was hardly anticipated, nor, thank the Lord most humbly, was it any of our devising; for Buchanan (that, by the way, was not his name) handed the man, still stubborn and insolent, over to his native subordinates, to be kept in the cells and questioned at frequent and regular intervals. He emerged in the end, free and without a mark on him, and was turned adrift into the hills, where he wandered at will and was well cared for by the clans as one of the "afflicted of God"; for he was raving mad. I found out afterwards that, taking it in turns, Buchanan's native constables had kept him awake by prodding him in the ribs with ramrods, and had allowed him no sleep, day or night, for a fortnight.

V.

The queer part about the whole trouble was that my bungalow escaped raiding, nor was any shot fired at or from it. Wallu, when not prowling, slept on his charpoy, fairly and frankly in the open compound, the rifle between his knees; and nothing I could say would dissuade him from what seemed like asking for it. "Lor' bless you, sahib," or the Pathan equivalent, "they won't touch *me*." And gradually I began to see that though the tribesmen were keen as mustard on

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getting either sahib or Gurkha, they thought twice before incurring all the infinite ramifications of a tribal feud which might ensue if they put a bullet through Wallu. True, nobody knew who his relations might be, or who would take up the quarrel. I believe, as a matter of fact, that by this time he was the only survivor of his family; but he was a bit of a mystery, having blown in from nowhere, as it were, and nobody knew anything about him. Truly, to see the great bulk of a thing swinging freely along the roadway with a straw in his teeth and "you be damned" in his eye, anyone might have believed that he had a whole clan at his back, somewhere over the skyline, and he lord of the whole push. Nor might anyone guess that he himself had spent many years in uncomfortable places distant from his home, in the small matter of Gul Zamán, deceased, and was even now on the unceasing *qui vive* owing to the presumed survival of Tor Khan, the brother; which, to my mind, makes his carelessness about sleeping in the open all the more inexplicable.

For all this I neglected no precautions. At nightfall our entire fit-out of silver, glass, china, cutlery, and anything else which we thought the Sardár across the way, or his expensive lady, might fancy were securely padlocked into one godown at the end of the verandah near our bedroom—securely, that is to say, as far as any security might be within those worthless walls and behind those barely cat-proof doors. For the rest, I trusted to Wallu, and to our increasing immunity.

A further precaution was a form of drill, in which, on the first sound of a shot fired, the memsahib was immediately and without hesitation or question to lie flat on the floor, and stay there till told to get up, thereby freeing the fighting portion

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of the ménage and giving it the elbow-room and field of fire which it needed.

But Wallu was our mainstay. He swaggered about by day, lord of creation, and sometimes would absent himself for hours, knowing that the house would be perfectly safe in the daytime; though by now we had a total of five casualties to mark up, and nothing to set against them but the witless wanderer in the hills. The incident of the smuggling party went by default. The Pathans, naturally, counted it a bull's-eye to us; but we were busy trying to forget it, and, in our secret souls, were thoroughly ashamed of it, so it lapsed from the score.

. . . . . .

I had long ago given up asking Wallu to help by keeping his ears open and gathering information of impending raids or snipings. He was too obviously in the enemy's camp for his fellow-Pathans to let him gather the least inkling of what intentions were afoot. Apart from which, it seemed almost certain that the raids were carried out from across the frontier line, either with the connivance or at the direct instigation of the Sardár of Kadanai, who was credibly reported to have bought, at his own price, the proceeds of every raid; while the snipings might have been anybody's work, since they rarely coincided with the lootings. But about this time I was seated on the edge of the verandah in company with Wallu, with whom I was discussing the situation; Hamish, the Aberdeen, squatting on his hunkers up against Wallu's baggy clothing, Wallu with his arm round the dog in clear defiance of Musalman precept which holds such animals unclean.

"I got hold of a bit of a rumour yesterday, sahib. The Sardár has a new recruit, a man they

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say is the cleverest thief on the Border. Nobody knows his name, but they say he's from my part of the world"—nodding in the direction of the Achakzai crags, hull-down on the horizon—" and I ought to know him. Can't think who he can be. They say he's boasted he will clean out the whole cantonment, and is coming in to the bazaar before long to get the hang of the place. He's over in Kadanai now . . . ." and he rumbled off into contemplative silence.

Long pause.

" You'd better potter about the bazaar a bit for the next few days and see if you can spot him. If he's from your part of the world you may be able to recognise him, and, if so, we ought to be able to round him up."

" I wonder . . ." and, with a puzzled " shaitán tamám ! " (the whole thing's the very deuce an' all !), he hove himself up on to his feet, spat contemplatively, and strolled off to his quarters.

. . . . . .

What happened, two days later, I pieced together from the accounts of the Gurkha bazaar-guard and from several eye-witnesses. The versions hang together in all details, so I may as well tell it just as it happened.

Wallu had gone off to the bazaar, as suggested. He was squatting in the main street in front of one of the open booths which, in the daytime, crowd the roadway in front of the shops, and was fingering over the wares while he chatted to the owner. Presently, from the direction of the South Fort, an uproar approached rapidly, and, looking up, he saw the father and mother of all sand-devils come whirling up the main street. Way and away on top of it spun a Gurkha hat and a government blanket, gathered up in passing over the

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Fort. The din was terrific. Strollers fled for shelter; booth-keepers grabbed their trays and spread-eagled themselves over their wares, while the loose matting roofs of the stalls blew to pieces; doors and shutters banged; small boys were knocked over, and dogs yelped and scattered into side-alleys; all who could hung on to anything solid within reach, and huddled together as the whirling breath of the Pit bore down on them with the clatter and roar of an express train coming through a dense fog. Wallu crouched low and bent his head between his knees, while for a full half-minute pandemonium raged in the thick darkness around him.

The devil went roaring on its way, pursued by yells of laughter and *décolleté* jokes as it was seen that the hat and blanket at its summit had been joined by two voluminous pairs of frill-bedecked feminine plus-fives gathered from a housetop, where they had been laid out to dry after washing. "Is it from *thy* housetop, Sher Dil?" "Nay, from *thine*, Abdul Majid?" . . . The fun grew fast and furious. But he whose Rabelaisian roars would have overtopped all—whose salty and shouted jest would have turned the sand in men's eyes to mud with the very tears of their laughter?

Silent.

Slowly they gather round him: a tiptoe circle. Don't touch him. Don't get too near, lest men should point an accusing finger! Each tries his best to be inconspicuous. . . . *Who did it? Who*, in the darkness of the sand-devil, did it? Whose is the axe. . . . For there lies the herculean bulk of Wallu, his fallen puggaree tangled in a heavy hatchet, his hair streaming in the foulness of the running gutter, and a great ragged hole in his head where his skull has been crushed in.

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"Tora," whispers somebody; "Tor Khan" . . . and they melt away, soft-footed.

Oh-*ho*; so they must have known about it all the time!

. . . . . .

The Gurkha bazaar orderly, full of importance, bustles up. "Hullo? Man dead? Who did it? Here, you *janwars*, help me have a look at him. Give a hand here. Hustle!"—and, with his cane, he herds the reluctant onlookers forward. "Turn him over, you," to a trembling Hindu shopkeeper; "who is he?" He peers. Whistles softly. "Wallu! Of the Karnél sahib's house! Now you've been and gone and done it. *Now* you've torn it, you ——s. Here, catch a hold!"

It takes half a dozen of them to lift him, the Gurkha nursing the shattered head tenderly. They place him on a *charpoy* and carry him to my house, whence, mercifully, the memsahib is absent. I meet the little procession on the verandah. "Wallu! What mischief has the old devil been up to now?" No explanations; the shortest of inspections; "Quick! Off to the hospital with him" . . . and, hot-footed, I precede him.

By a mercy, Macdonald, our doctor, is there; a man skilled in all the sudden blugginesses of the Border. He fingers the crushed and matted head carefully. "Lord," he whistles, "here's a job and a half." . . . Five minutes later, "Hope? I dunno. These chaps are damned tough, but I think he's booked. I'll tell you more when I've had a good look at him." (Pulse? No pulse. Cold. . . .) "Come back this evening, sir, and I'll tell you what I think. We'll do our utmost for him. Poor old Wallu," as he bends to his task, the hospital staff busy around him.

So homewards, with a heavy heart. By the

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Lord Harry, we'll make somebody smell hell for this!

By evening I return. There lies Wallu, cleaned, stripped of befouled clothing, lying on a ward-bed under a clean white sheet, his great head propped on a pillow and massive with swathe on swathe of white bandaging. Great blue valleys circle his sunken eyes; his wide jaws hollow; a grey pallor over all; his aquiline beak points stiffly to the ceiling as the great gasps of breath come hurtling out through his chalk-coloured lips. Lying there, helpless and on the verge of death; that magnificent specimen of lovable manhood. . . . *Dieu qui le fit de ses deux mains.* . . .

"We've had to trephine him. The only chance for him. Bad case."

"Will he live?"

"I'm afraid not. It would take the strength of three men to get over what *he's* been given. You see. . . ."

Details.

Once more homewards; two of us, since the memsahib, dainty, trim, and very frail-looking against the desert background, has been waiting outside the hospital door. She slips her arm through mine.

"You'll get even with them, won't you, Bill?"

"Please God!" says I.

VI.

There's nothing very much to be done. I lock up the old chap's quarters and then stroll down to the office, send for the Adjutant, and concoct new measures. Not, indeed, in a spirit of personal

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retaliation, nor in any sudden loss of balance; but because, so far, things have followed an awkward but definable course. Raids are raids, throughout the Border; also, shootings and snipings are the common lot of Frontier mankind; but when it comes to making personal war on the head of the show, the question of *izzat* (what they call 'face,' farther East) is involved; and if we let it slide we might as well chuck our hand in and give the other side best man.

With many little sums in addition and subtraction, and a close comb-out of 'employed' men, we find it will just about run to it. No more of these moving patrols, to be a gift to the lurker and to miss the raider. A complicated plan ensues, but one which will give a stationary escort to every bungalow and building not within the walls of the forts, each escort to have an absolutely free hand to use any and every feasible measure against the common enemy. One reservation I make, to save dwindling self-respect. There shall be no guard on the C.O.'s bungalow. The Adjutant stares.

"I don't think you're wise, sir."

"Never mind. I'm old enough and ugly enough to look after myself. Besides, after what they did to Wallu, I expect they'll avoid me like the devil. Make it so, will you?" And the orders go forth.

So, back home to dinner and bed; an automatic under the pillow, and a barely avoided breeze with the wife who refuses point-blank to go and sleep in the Fort.

Poor old Wallu. . . .

. . . . . .

Do what we would, we could not catch up with the situation. For now raidings and snipings

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synchronised. There would be a shot at an open bungalow window, and, while all guards in the neighbourhood turned out to hunt the sniper, a godown or a stable would be forced and the contents would vanish. Johnny Gurk is a superlative fighter, but his brains are worth about a capful of porridge; never could we make him understand that the man on the move is a gift to the man behind cover, or that each group had to look after its own show and nobody else's. A couple of bangs, and the air would be thick with bloodthirsty Gurks, hurtling like meteorites through space from all directions, and converging on an empty but still warm patch on the ground, while half the cantonment lay deserted and unguarded. Even after we had managed to get them to keep still, losses went on in a mysterious way. The Second-in-Command lost his first and second chargers in the same night, stolen from under the very noses of the guard; next night, in spite of redoubled precautions, his entire vine was stripped of grapes, a piece of pure mischief, since most of them were found abandoned out in the roadway next morning. Then cantonments got a bit of a rest, only to be broken by five minutes' rapid fire down the main street of the bazaar this time; the shopkeepers lying flat on their floors behind the heavy wooden shutters. The state of affairs was becoming chaotic, and was rapidly degenerating into a condition where Pathans with grudges against each other were beginning to pay off old scores, and saying the raiders had done it.

A mixed time altogether.

So down to the hospital for the daily visit to Wallu.

He had moved neither hand nor foot nor eyelid

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since the operation; but still he lived, if living you could call it, and still Macdonald watched over him, with little spoonfuls of milk, or egg, or the pernicious brandy which the sufferer would have spat out had he been conscious, forced between his blue lips. Hypodermic injections. There was nothing they would not do to keep the fluttering life within the four corners of its magnificent casket.

"Will he live?"

"By all the rules . . ." a headshake.

Home to the wife, who asks the same question, to get the same headshake. It is she about whom one frets most; she is beginning to look peaky, though there is never anything but the cheeriest of smiles. We bar and shutter everything and take a good look round the compound, stables, and servants' quarters. I slip a clip into the automatic, tuck it under the pillow, and we turn in.

B'jove, thinks I, if only we could catch this one blighter, this king-pin of all our troubles, who is at the back of all this intensive work, I really think we would scotch the whole business for good. Lummy, *what* a score it would be . . .

. . . . . .

With uncanny persistence the raids continued, though by now the sniping in cantonments had dwindled to about a shot a night and no harm done. The Gurks had learnt the drill. But the bazaar suffered, and buzzed like an angry bee-hive. Had they been able to spot the nuisance-mongers or their leader, they would have torn him to bits with their bare hands. Some one master-mind was obviously directing things, and each day brought fresh rumours of who it was that led them. Gumándar Shah, Qurbán Ali,

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Musa of Bostán? Names multiplied, and anybody who had a grievance against anybody in the hills or across the frontier line, whispered his name abroad as the common enemy. The raiders were ubiquitous and quite undefeatable; they came like wraiths, and vanished like smoke.

Another visit to Wallu, who by now puzzled the doctor. He showed us an X-ray photograph of the head. You never saw such a mess. . . .

"Trephining relieved it?"

"Oh, yes; he'd have been dead a fortnight ago but for that. But the brain; look here . . ." and he pointed.

Hope, then. There *must* be hope, even if the doctor's knowledge forbade it. Homewards, with a little of the gloom lightened, and an added relief at a clear full-moon night, in which, at least, peace might be expected. But, lord! to think that the old virile chivalry of the Border should have degenerated into this damned bang-snatch-and-scatter game! It was enough to make one pack up and go home to raise eggs on a poultry farm!

Same old round of the compound and, whether broad moonlight or not, testing locks and bolts. The dog to his usual corner in the dining-room near the precious godown, and ourselves to muggy slumber in the furnace heat of the bedroom.

Suddenly, from unmeasured oblivion, we wake with a start, to hear Hamish barking furiously. Grab the automatic, and into the dining-room. What is it, old dog? Hamish flies to the door leading into the verandah and scratches to be let out. A quick footstep outside, and the sound of something heavy and glassy being dropped and smashed, as I shoot back the bolts and stumble over an overturned deck-chair, Hamish darting

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into the open godown with angry and excited yelps. Quick—after the dog—he's on to something! Into the godown, whose outer and verandah doors hang groggily from smashed hinges, and the moonlight shows a scene of desolation. Floor, cupboards, shelves, everything ripped open and stripped bare. Raiders! Thought so! But the dog's on to them. After him. Round the corner of the bungalow, and into the back compound. A group of three, stooping over a load to be lifted. Bang! The sickly stink of bad Pathan powder, as a chunk of mud brick is dislodged and cascades down. Pull up quick. Panting, I raise the automatic, and pull the trigger, *hard*. Nothing happens; safety-catch on! Fumble hastily with the safety-catch, just as one of the group raises his gun again. Ah-ha; too *late*, old bird! The automatic answers loyally to repeated trigger-pulls; the group breaks up; two fly for their lives across the yard and hurdle the low mud wall separating the compound from the barbed wire and the open desert, I after them. Out on to the sharp shingle; an almighty toss and an ungainly sprawl, as one of those loose-fitting Jaeger slippers of the memsahib's providing comes off and trips me up. With breath clean knocked out of me, I make poor shooting with what remains of the clip in the automatic, and an empty pistol is all that I can point at two nimble figures skipping through the half-dismantled wire and out into the vague grey of the desert.

Bruised, dishevelled, and in a towering rage, I limp back to the house. A dawning calmness brings the realisation that there were two get-aways, but three at the outset. Lummy!—there's another somewhere, and this automatic as much use as a sick headache! Must get another

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clip before investigating further. Dodge quickly back into the verandah and in through the open door, to find the memsahib sitting on the edge of the bed, a vision of daintiness in a silk nightie and her toes dangling, but rather white about the gills; and Hamish—shame on you, brother Scot—cowering under the bed!—a tiger in a rough-and-tumble, but incurably gun-shy.

"Hullo, why aren't you flat on the floor?" —our somewhat ungracious welcome to the lady.

"Never thought of it. You all right?"

"Rather. Where are those clips? Lie down on the floor, quick! *Flat.* That's right; and don't move. I've got to investigate a bit more."

I grab an electric torch and dart out. By now the servants in their quarters have awoken and are beginning to hammer, each on his locked door. Before starting operations the raiders have securely fastened the chains to the staples of the outside door-fastenings to prevent any interference. Let them be a moment. The fewer messing about just now, the better.

Round to the back.

M'm; I *thought* so.

For there, in the middle of the moonlight patch, is a group composed of the big 'troopship case' from the verandah, its hasp and staple wrenched off and half-open, and a grey-clad figure all muddled-up alongside, and motionless.

With automatic well to the fore, advance carefully; no surprises, please. Closer. And now comes the subdued and whimpering cry of a man deadly hurt.

"Hwee-ee-e . . ."; hiccup.

"Hwee-ee-e-ah . . ."; hiccup.

"Hwee-ee . . ."

Take no chances. With the automatic to his

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ear-hole, flash the torch over him. Big burly ruffian. Don't know him. Where's he hurt? The voice rises to an agonised "Ai-ee-EE!" as I pull gently at his clothing, and desist. Poor devil. Got it somewhere amidships apparently. A sticky mess of blood oozes from under him.

Time now to loose the servants. In strict order of personal courage they emerge. First, Jagat Bahadur, the Gurkha orderly, his kukri handy, and raving at having been left out of the row. Then the syce, with a heavy stick; then the others, tailing on to the dog-boy. The cook not at all; but the wailings behind his door are those of a healthy man, not one who has caught a stray bullet.

Bring a *charpoy*, quick!

They come with a native bedstead. With infinite care we lift the poor blighter on to it, and set the servants to carry him off to the hospital, with a hasty note to Macdonald; Jagat Bahadur as escort, and as full of himself as if the *shikár* were his own.

Back to the bungalow; the memsahib, clean against orders, up and dressed, and Hamish with nose down, fussing about all over the place. A word or two; I tumble into my clothes, and the memsahib goes off to brew a pot of tea; or rather, to try to brew it, for in a minute back she comes again, white with rage and with unaccustomed swear-words in her dainty mouth. "The godown and kitchen are empty—empty, d'you hear? They've got the lot. Not a damn thing left!" And the intensity of her fury banks back the tears that should have been inevitable.

Dawn finds us piecing together in the early light the events of the night. Everything in the godown, the *bottle-khana*, and the kitchen, has van-

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ished. They must have been at it for hours—within four yards of the sleeping dog and close to ourselves—passing each man-load out through the wire to the rest of the gang beyond, who went off with it as fast as it accumulated. But how they managed to handle piles of plates, crockery, glass, lamps, tinkly knives and silver, the whole rattlesome bag of tricks, without making more sound than a prowling mouse, was a revelation in burglary. What had roused the dog at the end must have been the crowning piece of impertinence; for the big 'troopship case' which stood in the verandah, about the same shape and size as an oaken hall-chest here at home and which contained nothing more important than golf-clubs and odds and ends, this they had lifted bodily, and had managed to scrape through the broken godown doors and so out into the back premises. They must have made their first and slightest noise in doing it. And all this on one of the brightest moonlight nights of the year. 'Pon my soul, they almost *deserved* their success!

Late that afternoon we recovered one tiny survival, close up to the boundary pillars, in the direction of Kadanai—a handful of fragments which, when afterwards riveted together, took the shape of a small china milk-jug (with small pink pimpernel and forget-me-not pattern round the edge—rather chaste), our only trophy of the night's doings. We have it still.

The Lady of Baldak stood on the verandah edge. She, at a range of seven miles, faced the Khánum of Kadanai; and, as anyone could plainly see, was wishing in every fibre of her little tiger heart that the distance had been only that number of inches.

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VII.

So down to the hospital, and to Macdonald in the surgery.

"What news of Wallu?"

"He's still alive; it puzzles me how he manages it. He hasn't shown sign of consciousness, to my knowledge, since he came in here; and yet he manages to live. I can't help thinking there's something keeping that old beggar alive—some wild urge which was in his tough old mind just as he was struck down, and which keeps on now as a sort of dumb delirium—simply pushing out the thought of giving in. I've heard of it happening in other cases. Wonder what it can be. . . . But that's a bad case you sent in to me this morning, sir. Who got him?"

"H'm—a bad case, is it? D'you mind if I go in and have a look at him?"

I tiptoe down the long ward. There is Wallu, as stark and immovable as he has lain these three weeks past, hardly a change in the great gaunt features. On the bed next to him, watched over by the native assistant surgeon, lies our big Pathan of the night's business. I sidle in between the beds and bend over the unfortunate. One glance; he's booked, right enough. Questioned, the doctor-babu tells us of a ghastly and hopeless wound: the heavy automatic bullet has drilled him clean through the pelvis from hip to hip, and, lying on his back with knees drawn up, he is gasping out the last hour of his life.

Fine chap, big powerful profile; wonder who he can be? We study him closely. . . .

Down, Hamish! The dog is plucking at the slack of my khaki shorts from behind. Hullo?

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Can't be the dog; left him at home. Instantly an incredible thought flashes. I turn round with a jerk. *Wallu!* The long bony hand meets my bare knee. The great sunken eyes are open. Slowly, very slowly, an inch at a time, the bandaged head turns on the pillow, towards the next bed, in a keen and penetrating stare. "Sahib," in a whisper. I bend lower. "Sahib . . ." and, with a mighty effort, "sahib . . . *Tor Khan!*"

Slowly, slowly, by perceptible inches, the corners of the deeply sunken eyes wrinkle, and the great gaunt face breaks up into a smile of the most angelic beatitude; the eyes close, and, still smiling, he sinks into the long and healthy depths of life-giving sleep.

What? Oh, yes; *he's* all right. Not only still alive, but as strong as ever. Following my yearly practice, I sent him ten rupees last Christmas.

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X.

"FIAT EXPERIMENTUM . . ."

I.

It all began, many years ago, in the back-blocks of Assam, where, in John Company's days, it had been necessary to keep a Gurkha battalion for the maintenance of order and white prestige among a hill tribe recently pacified.

The cantonment had persisted well into the present century; on the whole, a delectable spot, where nobody bothered the soldier very much, and big game was both handy and plentiful. In the intervals of shooting, polo of a sort, on inadequately trained, and therefore ruinously combative, ponies of the small local breed, was played on a cramped and sloping ground the southern border of which was a mountain torrent with an eight-foot drop into it, and no handrail. The only bit of 'level' ground in the place. Altogether rather a sporting course; and, as you could hammer the ponies across the shins with a crowbar and raise no lump, all hands played all-out, and the game went like fury.

You are to see, then, the opposing 'back' coming like a lambent flame up the ground, dribbling the rather chipped ball, and closely attended by myself, whose whole job in life, for the hectic

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moment, was to ride him off and stop the rush. The ponies went up the ground locked together, leaning heavily inwards, ears laid well back, and snapping at each other: keener, if anything, than their riders. Rather a tangle, but quite usual. Suddenly all things vanished in a constellation of stars; and when Ursa Major, Orion, and the Southern Cross had sorted themselves out from their sudden rendezvous in the Milky Way and things had resumed their normal shape, it was obvious that my flea-bitten grey had crossed its legs, turned a complete somersault with, and incidentally over, its rider, and had left him in mid-field in a rather mixed condition, which included a dislocated right shoulder.

The battalion doctor being, fortunately, handy, a twisting wrench of the offending joint put all things into some sort of balance once more, and a hospital *dhoolie* did the rest in transporting the 'case' to bungalow and bed. So much for the opening of what afterwards turned out to be quite an interesting time.

Now in that village dogs were found, as many dogs there be, both mongrel, puppy—enough. Mine was the puppy: an Irish terrier, or 'tinker's dog,' to wit. Through the remainder had passed a scouring scourge of rabies, set afoot by a pair of low-bred spaniels belonging to the wife of one of the majors, and under strong suspicion of associating with jackals. These, choosing a quiet afternoon when nothing else was on, to suit some private end, went mad and bit—well, anything biteable, preferably dog, but also including a Commissariat bullock and a couple of geese belonging to the second-in-command. They laid a narrow but emphatic trail of devastation right through the middle of cantonments, till run to earth on the rifle-range

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and, mercifully, dispatched. Thereafter sporadic cases of rabies cropped up at frequent intervals, as dog after dog suddenly developed the latent infection; so that when, abed that afternoon with a very sore shoulder and rather hoping for peace and quiet, I saw the aforesaid tinker's dog gyrating with slavering jaws madly round the bedroom, there was no doubt of what was up. And when, again, he jumped on to the bed, stood uncertainly on four staggering legs, his ginger head weaving elliptically from side to side—poor little devil—then, without warning, bit me on the starboard side of the neck, the damaged shoulder preventing escape, and then fell off the bed again, it was obvious that some hard thinking impended.

The doctor, dropping in later to see how things were going, and finding bandages where no bandages had been, whistled. A quick inspection of the unfortunate offender confined in the servant's quarters ensued: "You'll have to get off for anti-rabic treatment, first thing to-morrow, by the mail-*tonga*." Details. Apparently the chance of getting rabies varied in intensity with the square of the number of days exceeding five which elapsed between bite and treatment. Rabies? More details. They were hardly a sleeping-draught for the night preceding next dawn, when, in company with a sleepy and disgruntled servant, the 'multiple casualty' was packed into the back seat of the two-wheeled, pony-hustled mail-cart, which, at an average speed of ten miles an hour and with frequent changes of ponies, played battledore and shuttlecock with its occupants over a bumpy hill road for seven agonising hours.

One day gone.

Here the river was reached, and the creaky stern-wheeler which pottered its way along the

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sandbank-infested reaches of one of the larger waterways of the world.

Railhead, and three days gone; and one day more before the string of decayed carriages drawn by the aged and tottering engine pulled into Calcutta.

Here things began to move. A change of bandages; a new sling for the arm, and the smooth-running mail train whirling along across the plains of India, Punjab-wards. And where the landscape had doddered past the window in syncopated measure, here, thanks be, it leaped. Still, seven days were past before the train decanted us at a small station, and, on angular and reluctant bazaar ponies, we whacked our way up a four-thousand-foot climb into the cloud-hidden haven where we would be.

Luckily, the Pasteur Institute kept, and keeps, open house at all hours. A quick inspection of papers by the Director; a few questions; "Here, come behind this screen." A little help in the casting of clothes; a table-load of gadgets, all sterilised and ready; something queer and most damnably unpleasant happens at the waist-line. "Thanks, you'll do. Got your dog's brain? Right. Let me have it, please. Turn up here at eleven to-morrow. What? Oh, no; I'm afraid we don't run to a hospital here. You'd better stay at the Club. Lots of other dog-bites there." And, to an obviously unusual back view he calls, "Here, you aren't fit to walk *or* ride. Wait a moment while I get you a *dhoolie*. Sit in that arm-chair a moment."

Merciful oblivion

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II.

Youth. Isn't it Conrad who tells of youth? Then he would understand how and why it was that a lad who had been thrown heavily at the landscape, dislocated, dog-bitten, bumped and hurled about for a week on one of the worst and most complicated journeys in the civilised world, with anxiety laid over all like a cold dish-cloth, and, at the end, injected with the Lord knows how many cubic centimetres of curative, but none the less damnably irritant, poison—how, then, that lad should wake on the morning of the eighth day stiff, sore, but glowingly happy in the rosy dawn of an Indian hill winter, and be ravenous for bacon and eggs. B'jove; those were the days!

Somewhere about eleven a dozen of us made our slow way down the *khud*.

The Institute dealt with every class, age, and colour—and both sexes. We queued up daily, the latest arrivals being taken first, and gradually assuming a lower place on the roll as the twenty-one days of the cure progressed. There was more in this than meets the eye. The daily roll of persons injected with the anti-rabies serum amounted to between sixty and eighty, and for these two hypodermic needles only were supplied. These commenced the day by being quite sharp; but by the time they had worked through the varying thicknessess of some seventy assorted hides, they took some pushing in, and the tail-end patient had to hang on tight to something firm while the doctor pushed. Hence a laudable effort by each and every patient to get as high up the roster as possible. The syringe, as thick as a moderate-sized

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breakfast sausage, held several cubic centimetres of the serum, and all this was injected under the skin of the bared waist-line—or, in the case of some of the patients, where the waist-line ought to have been,—immediately resulting in a hemispherical swelling, of which more anon.

Thence, but strictly *sub rosa*, to the rabbitry. Now, as we have seen, every patient brought with him, if in any way possible, the brain of the dog which had bitten him. An extract from this was injected into a healthy rabbit, which was forthwith shut into a numbered hutch, and the transaction entered in a book. For a small consideration it was possible not only to ascertain from the records babu the number of one's own particular rabbit, but daily to obtain access as well to the row of cages. Here the patient—vividly conscious of the fact that, whether anti-rabic treated or not, he could not be absolutely certain of immunity till six months had elapsed from the time of first infection—might be found, intensely interested in the health of his rabbit. Going in, one might meet a fellow-patient coming out, the gloom or joy on his face exactly commensurate with the apparent health of No. 29 or No. 47. A whispered "How's *yours* this morning?" answered by a cheery "Fine! Damn fine rabbit that. Eats like a horse, and kicks gravel!"—or possibly a gloomy shake of the head—or even, "Oh, Lord! *dead!*" Lest it harrow the reader too much, let me explain that, of course, the injection of the dog-brain extract into the rabbit was quite unaccompanied by any form of treatment; so that the death of the rabbit by no means argued a corresponding fatality to its human opposite number, who, with bedevilled abdomen, was enjoying all the benefits of the Cure.

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Thence the daily and, in view of the condition of one's tummy, painful climb up the hillside to the quarters behind the Club. Here let me explain that the almost immediate effect of the injection was that the half-cricket-ball which straightway resulted, under the skin, commenced forthwith to itch and burn like wildfire, the impulse of the patient to tear himself to bits with his finger-nails being almost irresistible. The cure for this was to lie flat on the back in bed, while the bearer, armed with a whisky bottle full of water many degrees hotter than was comfortable, slowly rolled the improvised rolling-pin up and down master's agonised and itching middle, after the manner of cooks and a pastry-board. This had to be done thoroughly, since it took some forty-eight hours to reduce the swelling; and, as alternate sides of the tummy were injected daily, there were only forty-eight hours in which to get it done. Woe betide him who presented to the needle an area still swollen and itching; the double effect was indescribable.

The muster-roll of patients was remarkable not only for the wide diversity of social and racial types represented—which, as was quite fitting, met on a level of equality when it was a question of roster precedence,—but also for the unimaginable diversity of the things which had bitten them. Of course, the actual bite by the teeth of a rabid dog was the normal; and, in this respect, the predominant class of patient was the 'sweeper,' the lowest caste of household menial, to the care of whom the sahib's dog is invariably committed. But there were also 'dog-licks,' where a dog, subsequently dying of rabies, was suspected of having licked the hand of the owner, what time he had an unhealed cut on it. There were also

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those who had handled dog-chains in similar circumstances; also simple 'contacts' and 'suspects.' But the one bond in common which sent 'bites,' 'licks,' and pure imagination travelling hot-footed to the Institute was the vivid realisation of the excruciating death to be expected of untreated rabies, however acquired.

Setting aside dogs, however, it was astounding to find what a number of other animals could not only acquire rabies, but could hand it on to mankind. There was quite a sprinkling of cat-bites, including the victim of a pair of Siamese cats, which, with Siamese unanimity, had gone mad simultaneously, and had died a twin death on the verandah (the sequel, as I heard it afterwards, being that the owner buried them at the bottom of his vine, which that year produced grapes of an unanticipated profusion and quality). There was a lady who had been bitten on the nape of the neck by a rabid horse—a bad case. There was the sahib who had assisted at the skinning of a tiger which he had shot, whose ante-mortem behaviour had been so peculiar as to have warranted description to the regimental doctor, who had diagnosed rabies, probably from attendant jackals, those widely distributed and prolific disseminators of the scourge. Last of all, there was a group composed of a subaltern and four elephant mahouts from distant Burma. They belonged to one of the Military Police battalions, which in those days owned their own transport elephants. The largest and favourite Jumbo of the team had been bitten by the subaltern's rabid fox-terrier, and had spent a week in the indescribable agonies and contortions of inevitable death, what time the slow-moving wheels of headquarter officialdom were being urged by frantic messages from the battalion

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to sanction the pitiable but valuable beast's destruction. At the thought of those tons of maddened muscle, chained fore and aft, and attended day and night by the devoted band of helpers, whose only power of alleviation lay in inducing the poor beast to swallow half-pound lumps of pure opium between the convulsions, the imagination boggles. Not until the merciful heavy-bore bullet had finished the tragedy did they pack up and make for the Institute, ten days' journey away, they who—off and on for days—had been beslavered with deadly infection from the whirling trunk. It speaks volumes for the versatility of the Indian Army officer that he who, two short years previously, had been going through a normal Sandhurst training should suddenly have found himself called upon to give improvised and emergent veterinary first-aid to a rabid elephant in the backblocks of Burma, and to adopt a line which, the Director of the Institute afterwards told him, was the only one that could have been of any use.

So thus we queued up daily; dog-bite, cat-bite, licks, contacts, horses, tigers, elephants, memsahib, sahib, child, native, and toddling piccanin—the names called out in strict order of precedence. Step behind the screen; indicate your chosen spot (a courteous concession this to the shrinking patient); hang on tight; z-z-z-zz, the peculiar sensation of the injected serum; scramble back into shed clothing; and so to bed (and bottle). And may I tell those who know not, that sensations of an altogether peculiar and specialised kind are to be experienced by him whose daily fate for three weeks it is to be punctured in immediate succession to an Indian sweeper—he, the toughness of whose hide would blunt an assegai.

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III.

In the inadequate house provision of the station it so happened that all the white inhabitants lived at the Club ; and, during the three weeks in which I shared the martyrdom common to all the rabies patients, it was my good-fortune to have what meals a tormented tummy permitted at the table occupied by one of the most varied collections of practical scientists which it has ever been my good-fortune to meet. These, enthusiasts each in his own job, were a stimulating means of escape from many wearying hours of the talk of symptoms, rabbits, and whatnot which went on at the other tables ; and, by sitting open-mouthed and receptive at the feet of wisdom, I was given much in exchange for 'intelligent silence.' So that when, at long last, I had completed my three weeks' course and owned a waistline scarified into the complicated patterns of that of a tattooed Nilotic negress, I had also acquired one or two firm friends and some very companionable acquaintances. Having still full possession of five prospective weeks of the two months' leave usually given on these occasions, I decided to stay where I was. The scientists offered to the layman that most unusual hospitality, their inner secrets and the workings thereof. New vistas of unimagined interest appeared. The thing seemed too good to be missed.

Now, for the full understanding of what may appear, at first sight, to be medical clowning, it should be remembered that the period in which we lived coincided with the opening years of King Edward VII.'s reign, when—whether *post hoc* or *propter hoc*—India suddenly 'got religion' in the

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form of medico-mania; and those at the top who were responsible no less for the health of the *ryot* than for that of the Services, for some reason hidden in the impulses of mass-psychology made a concerted effort to bring into line with the very latest scientific knowledge the, to say the least of it, archaic systems which had been good, or bad, enough for our grandfathers in the days of the Mutiny, and had descended to us.

Money, brains, and experts to wield them, appeared from the most unexpected sources. The Very Greatest of All the Viceroys waved a stately hand and emitted a few rounded sentences; and, lo and behold, it *was* so.

The hilltop on the flanks of which lay the Pasteur Institute had suddenly sprung into life with an assortment of Government scientific, experimental, and research stations, where the weirdest things were investigated, concocted, and brought into being by prolific and enthusiastic brains. Not, indeed, of the grave and reverend signor in a black coat, but of a shirt-sleeved, perspiring selection of indomitable enthusiasts whose open-air habits were visible in browned forearms and the bared knees of khaki shorts, anything but conventional. Nor let it be thought that research in India was carried out under conditions which now obtain in Gower Street or at Putney Heath; India, where the best air is thick with fortuitous contamination; where the hands and clothing of subordinates are a mass of potential infection; where the investigator has to be careful lest one of the many drops of moisture from a teeming forehead should introduce unexpected developments into the carefully guarded brew over which he leans, and where the simplest writing is impossible without a strip of blotting-paper under

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the bared forearm to prevent it from sticking to the paper. Here we had research, with a spade: the real M'Kay. I repeat that this was all many years ago; but what are, nowadays, the commonplaces of expert investigation, and accepted scientific facts, were in those days making a very uphill struggle of it; and it may be of interest to know what queer—in some cases, what very queer—beginnings gave rise to the ultimate invaluable results.

A large and well-planned Research Institute was being built on the topmost pinnacle of the station; and while it was still in process of construction the officer selected to be its Director had installed himself in a makeshift laboratory the plaster on the walls of which was still wet when he moved in, and which resounded with the blows of stone-masons, bricklayers, and carpenters in the adjacent rooms. Here he assembled round him half a dozen chosen associates, keen as mustard and all out to learn.

Their first task was the production in large quantities of that invaluable anti-typhoid vaccine which, in the end, brought down the incidence of this scourge among white troops from 40 per cent of average cases to something less than one. It is difficult to realise that, within the memory of most of us, Roberts' army at Bloemfontein lost over ten thousand men in two months from typhoid, where, had they had the safeguards discovered shortly afterwards, the number would have been under a hundred. Nowadays every officer and man throughout the Service gets the defence as a matter of routine, and all is well. Set that aside for a moment. So sure is the protection and so simple, that it lacks features of interest. But another safeguard of intense personal

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interest to every man, woman, and child throughout India was the production of snake anti-venene, the deaths from snake-bite throughout India having, in one of the recorded years, reached the high total of twenty thousand.

The process is simple. Poison is collected from the captive snake by inducing him to bite on to a deeply concave watch-glass; the few drops of pale yellow death join others of a similar nature previously collected; the different poisons, for a technical reason, must never be mixed. The liquid is evaporated, crystallised, and bottled as a granulated white powder, whence a tiny modicum is taken and injected into the veins of a horse, or horses, kept for the purpose; the dose being very gradually increased at intervals until the horse is able to take a full injection, or more, of, let us say, cobra poison, and be none the worse for it. Blood is then drawn off from a vein in the neck of the horse; the serum is separated from the blood and bottled off into tiny glass capsules, and, issued to hospitals throughout the land, forms a ready-made first-aid for injection into a snake victim, and thereby gives him the chance of survival which would otherwise be negligible.

The good-natured Director, who sat next to me at table, had asked me to drop in and see his show. Needless to say, I did so. And the first thing he did when showing me round was to open a small cupboard in the wall and display a row of innocent-looking bottles apparently filled with common table salt.

"One and a half lakhs' worth[1] there," said he. "Afraid of its being stolen? Not much. It's about the least marketable article on the

[1] Say, £11,000.

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face of the earth"—and he shut the door carefully. Asked why it should be so valuable, he explained the high wages involved in snake-catching and collecting, by slow degrees, what must have been gallons of poison to provide the evaporated powder. Of a truth, few men would fancy the job. But it was typical of the catchem-alivo condition of the chaotic equipment with which he had to be satisfied, to begin with, that the cupboard door was locked with a two-rupee bazaar padlock which a crooked hairpin could have picked.

And see, now, how tiny things may sometimes convulse empires. It so happened that, some months after my stay, a critical situation arose in the sudden need for the production of the vaccine which would immunise against bubonic plague. India, as everybody knows, is not only in a constant condition of plague, which either lies dormant or flares up into terrific epidemics, but was the exporter of the commodity to Europe in days long anterior to the Black Death. The population literally takes it lying down, though, with its tortuous Oriental mentality, it gives a sheep-like acquiescence to the white man's efforts to fight the scourge; sheep-like in more ways than one, since it is liable to the same ovine panics. Now it so happened that the beginnings of the Research Institute coincided with one of the worst plague epidemics of modern times; this, centred in Bombay, called for urgent measures, and what as good as the new plague-serum treatment?

What happened next remained, for half a generation, one of the puzzles of medical science. To give its solution to-day can harm nobody. The protagonists are dead, or far from any activity.

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In any case, the thing was the purest accident, such as may happen in the best regulated systems. Anyhow, what happened was that in answer to a wild S.O.S. from the Bombay side, the Institute rolled up its sleeves, and for weeks drove itself haggard and sleepless in the production of plague vaccine. This, brewed under the eye of—very often at the hands of—the master-mind, was bottled off into glass capsules. Each capsule, twice as thick and as long as a man's thumb, contained one dose. The open end of the carefully sterilised tube was drawn to a fine point in the flame of a bunsen-burner, and, a tiny hole being left for the emission of air, was placed in what was known as a centrifugalising machine, which, highly geared and at an alarming pace whirling the capsules placed in swinging metal pockets round its edge, shook the contents down into the butt of the capsule and allowed of the glass being finally sealed in a flame, and thereby protected from any possible contamination.

Thus sealed, the tubes were carefully labelled, packed, and despatched to the Bombay plague-centre, whence they were distributed broadcast to out-lying hospitals and dispensaries, the most striking results by the new scientific treatment being confidently anticipated by all. The event was, indeed, striking. From far and wide came reports of death by tetanus, following on each injection. The natives panicked wholesale. The Poona Brahmin class, ever fishers in troubled waters, spread the instant report that the sahibs were poisoning the people. Riots occurred. The native press worked overtime. Hysteria raged. There it was; we *told* you so; once let the sahibs interfere with the inscrutable workings of

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Mai Kali[1] and your violent and painful death is certain!

There was the deuce to pay.

In answer to every imaginable form of imprecatory accusation, the Institute offered, and got, the closest investigation of its actions and methods. An inspecting committee found, and reported, the methods of manufacture flawless.

After some six months of convulsion, in which every evil passion that could be scraped together by the mischief-mongers, and every pacificatory action possible by Government and by its rapidly greying district officials, had been exerted to the full, the panic died down. To-day the whole thing has passed into oblivion, and the plague vaccine is accepted with confidence by all. But it was an ugly time while it lasted.

By the purest chance one of the assistant doctors at the Institute discovered how the trouble had occurred; and, wise man, kept his counsel till, many years later, he met me, and told me. Apparently the new centrifugalising machine, fresh from England, had, on arrival, been found to be out of order. Its repair awaited the arrival from district headquarters of a skilled white mechanic. Meanwhile the hurry of the vaccine production was in full blast. The Eurasian medical subordinate—long ago passed to where all is covered by the Great Forgiveness,—whose job it was to centrifugalise and flame-seal the capsules, found them piling up on his hands, and no workable machine. Being of an inventive frame of mind, he devised his own. He sent a peon flying to the nearest junk-shop in the bazaar, with orders to bring back the hind wheel of a bicycle, its chains,

[1] The Goddess of Destruction, at whose sacred hands all epidemics are reverently accepted by the Indian masses.

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and its pedal. An axle was fixed upright on a properly sterilised table; the gear-wheel, with its pedal, was fixed the proper distance away, on a similar axle, and connected to the main wheel. The small metal-hinged pockets were fixed each to where the spokes met the outer rim of the large wheel, and set revolving at high speed by turning the pedal. It worked.

In went the capsules, carefully handled. Turn it, Ram Baksh! Turn like mad!

Round went the wheel at a frantic pace, till Ram Baksh was breathless. Stop! Each capsule was picked out of its socket with a pair of sterilised forceps, inspected, safely sealed, and put carefully aside—to all seeming, safe, harmless, uncontaminated, and inviolable. And so forward, batch after batch, for three days, till, the proper machine having been repaired, the improvised gadget was dismantled and flung on the dust-heap.

Now, it would have been easier to see, than to gather from this lame description, what had occurred. The sterilised tubes had been put into their sockets, handled by nothing which could contaminate them, and similarly removed. But during the sixty seconds during which the wheel whizzed round and round at a pace which precluded observation of what was happening, the base of each capsule pocket flew outwards, as it was planned to fly, till it lay horizontally in its flight. Yes; but as each capsule, in obedience to the laws of centrifugal force, lay over to the horizontal and its base projected outwards, so, also, did its glass tip project inwards; and during one hectic minute, every one of those open nozzles, afterwards so carefully sealed, was rubbed with irresistible force against the rim of a wheel which, in the nature of all bicycle wheels in a damp

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Indian summer, must have been thick with tetanus germs.

Needless to say, nothing of the sort would have been possible in the right machine, which three days later came into use, and was afterwards inspected by the committee.

A pure mischance, as much a mischance as a spark in a munitions factory, which, exploding, flattens half a city, and with an equal casualty list.

. . . . . .

It was not, however, all mischance and tragedy in that realm of brains and bodies working overtime.

It is in no spirit of apology, but rather as recording simple fact, that I say that among such a diversity of specialised brains—each riding its hobby at an unbitted pace and through unaccustomed ways—many preternormal things were, as a direct consequence, thought, said, and done. Here we had men who, not content with the overwhelming work of their daily job, used their rare leisure moments in launching out into the peculiar experiments which seem to be inseparable from an active brain in full possession of a laboratory; as witness the surprising things, varying between the nauseating and the detonatingly hazardous, hatched in the lab. by boys of the modern side, when Jove nods. Much, however, was plain and painstaking research, in elaborating and adapting the learning evolved in Europe to the sudden confrontation with the necessities of India. There was therefore little to surprise, in the tale told to me—again, many years afterwards—by one of the doctors of the Institute. He, afflicted with a violent cold in the head which kept him busy and miserable every year from November to February, determined

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to flatten it out by the methods which were at that time still in the stage of experiment; colds in the head, as everyone knows, but did not know then, being caused by a bug; it has a name; no matter.

Now the theory of vaccines, to this layman, appears to be this. The bug is caught, killed, made into a brew, and injected into the recipient. Presently the live bug arrives, enters, and, finding the blood littered with the dead bodies of his friends and relations, panics, and makes for the nearest exit. The effect is much heightened if the bug which is actually and successfully attacking the patient can be caught, killed, and injected; since that section of the bug family which is active gets a far worse fright if the dead bodies which he meets floating about are recognisably his own relations. The thing then becomes an auto-vaccine; and such is the callousness of the bug that in nine cases out of ten it needs this personal appeal to his feelings before he will make up his mind to depart altogether.

This bug-strafing subject has been reduced by keen brains to an art, and includes mathematical calculations whereby it is possible to tell how many millions of the dead bodies can be put into a cubic centimetre of fluid, and a graph produced showing the rise and fall of the resistance, as tested by taking a drop of blood from the injected patient and putting it up against an equal strength of the active bug, the fearsome complications then being watched with much interest through a microscope. The blood's power of keeping its end up is measured on to a scale, and it is a peculiarity of the blood that for the first day or so during which the jumble of live and dead bugs is sorting itself into ordered progress, a deep and depressing

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reaction takes place. This depressed period may be serious if it lasts too long, hence the necessity of starting with small doses, even though measured in millions, of the dead bug.

In the making of the vaccine at the Institute the liquid was drawn up out of a shallow glass dish through a very long thin pipette marked into intricate graduations. These had some obscure reference to the 'millions' in the dose. The whole thing worked on the metric system, a strange medium to X., who for this reason seems to have got his figures wrong and shifted a decimal point one step too far to the right. With the result that he gave himself a dose ten times too big. It nearly blew his head off. He was remarkably ill, and was still in bed when I went down the hill. But meeting him again some years later and being rather surprised to see him still alive, I asked how he had fared. "Wonderful dope that," he said. "It nearly killed me. But the upward rebound was simply terrific. I swallowed both my adenoids, developed a full baritone singing voice, acquired air passages like a sperm whale, and have never had sniff or snuffle from that day to this. Did it. In once. Like to try it?"

IV.

Long before I had exhausted the possibilities of the Research Institute and the indulgence of its Director—and, goodness knows, there were more marvels to carry away in one's head than space would ever permit of record here,—the Directors of the other Institutes at our table were suggesting visits each to his own particular stamping-ground, where each produced results which, if they began

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by moving in the rhythm of the Funeral March of a Marionette, soon settled into a smooth and steady output of invaluable achievement.

Imprimis, there was the Veterinary Research Institute, which revelled in the unaccustomed lore of rinderpest, foot-and-mouth disease, cow-pox, and goodness knows what other ailments of India's sacred cattle, interference with the peculiar habits of which—whether living or approximately dead—was, and for all I know may still be, hotly resented by the mild Hindu. Here the Director, informative and entertaining as were all the others, yet showed a certain sensitiveness under close questioning, so that any peculiar convulsions in the working out of his prophylactics remained behind the purdah. To this day the Veterinary Institute's job must be a thankless one, faced as it is with native opposition ranging from open hostility down to that fatalistic acquiescence in the suffering of dumb animals which to us is as abominable as it is reprehensible.

Close by stood the Agricultural Research Station —skilled in wheat-rust, long-stapled cotton, boll-worm, lime-content in rice, manures, and what not. To the lasting regret of its personnel, who dreamt of brain-waves on a cool hill-top, it was afterwards removed to the Plains, where the crops which formed the basis of its experimental labours could be laid out flat, and not pinned like an exhibit on to the precipitous hillside. Remembering the intense conservatism of the Hindu cultivator, one is inclined to think that this was an even more thankless expenditure of brains than that of the Vets.

But of all the peculiar subjects of which the friendly scientists raised the purdah, commend me to that of the Excise. In a retired spot which

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was well down the hillside, and which took some finding, stood an unobtrusive building which housed activities altogether disproportionate to its appearance. Here, indeed, in the Excise Research Station, great things and passing queer came to pass.

Let us note at the outset that the Indian Government makes perfectly legitimate money out of excise on native spirits, an intensely complicated subject in a land where any standardisation of the alcohol content of the highly coloured rotgut firewater of the bazaars is all but impossible. In a land, moreover, of three hundred and forty million inhabitants where the plain cookery lore of the housewife has, from time immemorial, included all the simple recipes whereby any form of starch or sugar may be turned into potent drink. Domiciliary visits, apart from being inadvisable, would be impossible ; so private brewing goes by default. As an instance of the difficulty : the brown man shins up the palm-tree, gathers a sickly sweet juice from its top, descends, and places the liquid in an earthenware bowl previously smeared inside with lime. He does this, say, at 1 P.M. Up to 3.59 P.M. the liquor is a harmless, though rather nauseating, equivalent of our lemon-squash ; at 4 P.M. exactly it turns into a hair-raising fluid, having drunk which a man forthwith ascends to keep company with gods, or descends into the brute creation, as his psychology may direct. At 3.59 it is bland, even praiseworthy ; at 4 P.M. it is most emphatically excisable. Now what are you to do with people like that ? Is a policeman to stand over the bowl, and *time* the beastly explosive with a stop-watch ?

The most that can be done is to subject all public liquor shops in the bazaars to taxation, according to an attempted standardisation of the

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alcohol content of the stuff permitted to be sold; and here was where the Excise Research got most of its work: that, and analysing any new alcoholic invention which the ever-fertile Hindu brain might devise. As a side-line, and by no means an unimportant one, there were the endless aspects of narcotic poisons and drugs with which the Indian underworld often squares its personal differences, sent up by the police for analysis and report. Here, it was vividly realised, was infinitely varied and quite untouched subject-matter for those who make money by crime and murder novels, the author needing but to sit on the doorstep and reach out for his facts as they slid past.

David ap Rhys Evans (let us call him), the Director, was a Welshman of fertile brain and, like all his countrymen, of boundless energy. Not content with a daily job which would have caused a strike in a convict prison, he was always ready for side experiments. He had an ambition, among other things, to produce a tabloid concentrate of spirituous matter which—though my description of this may be wrong—when diluted at a quart of water to the pilule, would form a valuable portable adjunct to the curing of skins of animals on a shikar trip. Further joys cropped up, as when the Club Secretary told him that he suspected the head khitmatgar of opening the Club whisky bottles, extracting a considerable portion of their contents, and filling up with water. " I'll fix him," said Evans; " bring me two or three of your new bottles." These, apparently untouched, were presently handed back, and were stored with the remainder. Next evening the khitmatgar waited outside the office to see the Secretary. Admitted, he produced a freshly opened whisky bottle. " Very bad whisky coming this lot, sahib.

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Look "—and he held forward a bottleful of bright liquid of a baleful green colour, in the midst of which floated, and apparently fought, a pair of full-fledged butterflies.

But Evans' real brain-wave came with a theory the development of which I was privileged to witness from its birth to the point where it met a sudden and emphatic death. Evans had read somewhere a long and circumstantial account of the rather ghoulish experiments of a French scientist whose line of country was the weighing of unfortunates *in articulo mortis*, and proving, by a minute loss of weight at the moment of death, that the soul has actual specific gravity. Further, there were the experiments, back in the 'eighties, of a certain doctor in Dublin who dabbled in spiritualism, and who had produced figures showing the variations in weight of a medium placed on a weighing chair with his feet clear of the ground, corresponding with the psychic phenomena produced during periods of trance—in this case amounting not to fractions of a gramme as recorded by the Frenchman, but to several pounds.

Ve-ry well, thought Evans. Now, if the body loses weight through the departure, whether temporary or permanent, of the spirit to other regions, the converse must be equally true, and an unexplainable *in*crease of weight be expected if the *psyche* could be abnormally intensified—as, for instance, in the hyperæsthesia of intoxication.

Forthwith, he set his theory to the test. He hired half a dozen hillman coolies—cheerful, idle ragamuffins, each with a wild rose or a sprig of hawthorn tucked between cap and ear—and housed them in a godown behind the Institute. On a fixed monthly pay, and no duties except to take what the sahib gave them to drink, and, at stated

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intervals, to be placed in a weighing-chair. When the news got abroad, he had to keep the swarming candidates off with a stick.

Anyhow, he put the six through a graduated course, in which the stuff administered was carefully weighed beforehand. He got some surprising results at once; his theory was proved up to the hilt. But what puzzled him and prevented him, as a scientist, from publishing his results, was the fortuitous and arbitrary way in which the figures varied. He showed me some of his graphs; the thin red lines certainly seemed to dance about in the most extraordinary fashion.

He persevered. He not only intended to work out a constant figure, but even had visions of producing different grades of weighable psychic intensification with varying brands of whisky! In the midst of it all a worthy English weekly, which had as its presiding goddess a lady noted no less for the scantiness of her clothing than for her habitual residing place at the bottom of a well—whose editor (I repeat, it was many years ago) had a flair for ferreting out other people's private concerns and turning them into artificialised public scandals—this journal got wind of his perfectly harmless activities with the coolies, and made a nine days' sensation of them. The Indian Government had to take notice; had the honour to inquire; finally, had the honour most emphatically to direct . . .

Full stop.

Evans was inconsolable.

Some time later I, having at last seemingly exhausted the informative reservoir of my tablemates, and having packed to go down the hill again, was smoking an after-breakfast pipe in the Club verandah, and, in company with several others,

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was waiting for my coolies. Suddenly broke out the hades of a shindy. The bazaar down the road was shouting itself hoarse; screams and yells rent the air; dust flew; dogs and hens scattered and fled in all directions; and out of the turmoil burst a maniac apparition. A full-grown man-size *langùr* monkey of the hill jungle, the venerable grey hair which framed his black face fluffed out to startling proportions, his long skinny arms whirling like flails and his legs going like piston-rods, came tearing up the centre of the road at a pace of knots, and, foaming at the mouth, flashed past the Club and on into the blue.

A yelping mob of pi-dogs followed, though obviously keeping at a respectable distance.

"*What* the . . ."

A moment or two later arrived Evans, breathless, dishevelled, and with a deep and freely bleeding rent down one side of his face.

"Seen a monkey anywhere?"

We *had* seen a monkey. Proceeding on urgent private affairs. Want him?

"No. For the Lord's sake, let him rip. I was afraid he'd tear the bazaar up by the roots. Damned volcano. . . ." And then, disjointedly, he told us how, being defeated on the coolie business and his experiments being still far from complete, he had had a brain-wave. If he mightn't have coolies, he'd have a monkey. He'd offered five rupees reward for a good specimen brought in, which, caged up, he had filled with the experimental juice. "It was like pouring whisky down a sink; he took three-quarters of a bottleful without making sign or sound; solemn as an owl; so I gave him some more. Suddenly the whole dose seemed to grip him, all in once—not gradually, you understand, like you and me; but all in a

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flash, as though he'd suddenly grasped what I wanted. He just exploded, went straight in off the deep end. Went through the bars of the heavy bamboo cage as though they were a paper hoop, and flashed up the khud and into the bazaar.

"Ah, well . . ."

Where was he off to? Evans seemed to think that, in the *langùr's* condition of imperfect education, he had gone off with a minimum of delay to confide in the female of the species, which—for this once at anyrate—was less deadly than the male.

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XI.

A RAPID SURVEY.

I.

THE advanced-guard stumbled out of the edge of the jungle into the open, and, at the very strangeness of having a clear and sunlit space before it, came to a dead stop. The remainder of the single-file string of ragged, sweaty, laden men oozed out in the tracks of the forerunners, and the whole made a tousled mob on the edge of the clearing.

Nobody spoke. The lifting of the deadweight of twilight; the freeing of body and limbs from constant struggle with the clogging green tangle, which had become part of our very selves; the sheer relief of open air and direct sunlight; all these came almost as pangs in their intensity, and affected each man of us according to his nature. I glanced sideways at a grizzled Gurkha next to me, and saw him slowly draw the remnants of the back of his khaki cuff across his snub nose; had it not been unthinkable, I would almost have sworn that it was tears and not the other thing that needed attention. For this was the first patch of open sunlight, the first bit of level space, the first clear and untangled acre of ground we had seen for four back-breaking months; and it got us all rather in the diaphragm. And there,

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at the farther edge, perched on a cliff which ran down into our old enemy the river, stood, all neat and shiny and regular in the mid-day sun, Dambúk Stockade.

By gum!

. . . . . .

The silence was broken by a loud thumping on the gong, as the sentry in his crow's-nest look-out above the quarter-guard summoned the havildár and shouted the news to him: "They've returned; and lord knows what's happened to them, havildár-*ji*, but it looks as if they'd got tired of their clothes!"

Well, we *were* rather scarecrows, though fit and lean with hard work and short rations. The sound of the gong broke up our grouping and sent us, still very silent, across the flat—feeling not so much the relief of the homecoming as the first sensation of being able once more to step out instead of toilsomely up or stumblingly down. The backs of our knees wanted straightening a bit.

For we were just in from a long survey-exploration into the inner fastnesses of the Assam hinterland; a big, tangled, uncrossed country full of uncertainties; unknown, except as the home of uncomfortably spiky and unclothed denizens whose habit at that time was—and, for all I know, may still be—to discourage any closer acquaintance. These, with their dahs, bows and arrows, and long thin spears, had been our problem ever since the previous November. Huddled in their long low huts, and kippered till they stank in the damp wood smoke of the communal fire, they lived pig-dirty and without pride. They lived, moreover, under a steady inferiority complex with regard to their spiteful and aggressive wives, who, prog-

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nathous, shrewish, and incredibly naked in person and in manners, vented their spleen in driving their menkind into raids and head-huntings, and at times even into attacks on the stockades of the Raj in the adjacent plains.

Their home was a dense tangle of primeval jungle which clung to an up-ended terrain running all ways at once, and had no settled feature but the tumbling angry river which wrought a crooked and rapid-encumbered way for itself through gorges of its own fashioning. Avoiding these we clambered up—and oh, how we clambered!—and slung ourselves down, down again by insecure foot- and hand-hold, one eye cocked on the apology for a path, the other on the look-out for snakes, and the third (which lies in the ears, or the back of the head, or occasionally in the nose) bright and skinned for any sign of the jungli inhabitants whose strictly preserved domain we were traversing; a domain which ran from the river up to the snow-line fifteen thousand feet above, every inch thick in jungle of which the hinterland was, perhaps, south-western Tibet; or, possibly, China. How far? Nobody knew. We had gone to find out, and, worn to shreds with climbing, sweating, short rations, leeches, and the eternal war with primeval and tangled Nature, had been forced to give up and come in before the rains broke. Sickly white with the steady sunlessness of the jungle, sodden with sweat and the eternal drenching, footsore and thin, we had had about enough of a land of which it is said that "for six months of the year it rains, and then the monsoon starts."

Yet we would have gone on, but for the impossibility of coping with any general breakdown, and consequently of humping the casualties as well as our own loads. So, while vividly conscious

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that what we had failed to do this year would have to be done all over again and, what was more, extended in the next, we were for the moment well quit of the damnable jungles in which we had lived and striven, and which, years afterwards, and after our many and sustained attempts, finished by conquering us.

But that is a long story.

II.

Early next morning, after the fashion of the common hangman, we burned the rags we stripped off our worn-out bodies. It took a bit of heart-hardening to do it, where odds and ends of hitches and home-made repairs, botched and cobbled boots and soles, with notions of independent action, had acquired a value and an intimacy which made them old friends, and where the solid and brass-bound belt was, like Ben Gunn's, the only thing which kept the upper portion of the wreckage together.

Baird, the Political, stamped and shook himself into his new confinements, and lurched across to the quarter-guard to take stock of the more valuable portion of our possessions dumped here, when, travelling light, we had dived into the hill country. He being he, the first thing he unearthed was a mahseer rod and a box of winch and tackle. These he spread abroad and sorted, and presently assembled and carried down the cliff to the first silent pool on which he had set eyes for months past—the big open reach where the bullied and tortured river sighed with relief over its sandy bed, spread itself into quiet lakes as far down-stream as was visible, and closed its eyes in the placid sleep of exhaustion.

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Marriott, the Sapper, and I strolled off to the men's huts, bent on further incendiarism and rejuvenation of outfit. The little men were paraded, stripped, and, with the help of the doctor-babu, examined for minor damages, and given the thorough swabbing down with strong permanganate of which the jungle-scarred and insect-bitten hides of all of us were so badly in need. Poor little devils; they were thin to emaciation. But, lord! what merry grins; and what a schoolboy romp they made of it when they dived into their fresh kit.

Throughout the day we fed, and slept, and fed again. . . . One at least of the expedition spent an hour sitting hip-deep in the luxuries of a steaming hot bath, kept hot by relays of boiling water, and meditating on things like beds, and grub, and clean clothes, and the unchancy security of the morrow, and laziness—and again, grub. And while he thought these high and lofty thoughts he scratched himself, slowly and luxuriously, all over. The leech-bites and the leg-sores itched most confoundedly; but it had been a gorgeous time, on the whole. . . .

. . . . . .

Baird stumped up from the river-bed; he poked his cheery face in through the flap of the hut doorway, his speech thick with a mouthful of Huntley & Palmers; and it was guessed, rather than heard, that he had an idea—"and get some clothes on quick, and come over to the Mess."

Now this was his Bright Idea to which presently the Sapper and I, clothed and in that receptive frame of mind which comes when material preoccupations lift, listened as we sat at the botched plank table in the Mess, and dipped regularly and steadily into the colossal tin of ginger-nuts which

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stood open between us. Baird, incurable fisherman, had been down to the river. In a long day he had caught nothing; but he had, in the last five minutes, been smitten all of a heap with a notion. Why slog all the way back through the jungle, five days to headquarters, when we could float? There, now!—and he tossed the idea at us as a bone to dogs, and turned once more to the tin.

Now, to understand his brain-wave, we must note the fact that, months before, we had penetrated an all but pathless fifty miles of jungle which lay, down-country, between headquarters on the main bank of the river and the starting-point of the exploration, where sketchy information and a telescope from the crow's-nest in the headquarters stockade had indicated the debouching of the river from the cliffs and crags of the foothills. We had taken a compass-bearing, and, on that bearing, had forced our way through the jungle, making an unexpectedly accurate landfall at the foot of the gorge. There we had built the advanced-base stockade in which we now sat and to which we had struggled back, like watery bread, after many days. A theodolite survey and triangulation of the unknown country we were to penetrate had been begun. The river itself, buried clean out of sight in solid jungle, had remained unexplored. Consequently nobody knew its length, or how it behaved between headquarters and the foothills; and, as an avenue of possible approach, it had been left severely alone in favour of jungle-encumbered but, at a pinch, negotiable *terra firma.*

Discussed; was it the same river? Undoubtedly, you old ass. No room for any other; same river that passes headquarters. Why use it? Well, you see, if we have got to do this damnable business

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over again, next year, it would be top-hole to use dug-out canoes and water transport instead of humping stuff through that infernal tangle on the plains. Was it shorter, or as short? Goodness knew. Was it navigable? Well, looking down on the placid reach below us, we were tempted to hope that it was. Would the length (unknown) divided by the difference in altitude between headquarters and the advanced base, give an angle of descent which would flow smoothly and navigably, or proceed to destination by a series of probably rock-encumbered unnavigable bumps and jolts?—rapids, in fact. Subconsciously, very carefully unexpressed, lay the idea in the back of each of the three minds, of one or more vertical falls. Would it. . . .?

Oh, damn your silly riddles. *Let's try!*

. . . . . .

Again digress for a moment. A last-minute, maiden-aunt-like present had been made to us as we were leaving headquarters. Whence it had originated, or why, nobody quite knew, but it was plastered on to the tail of our carrier-line like an unnecessary note of exclamation at the end of a lady-novelist's sentence, and with a similar irritating inconsequence. It consisted of two coolie-loads of unmanageable junk, which had been the bane of our lives for the first five marches; a collapsible boat—all ribs and canvas, bolts, nuts, rowlocks, oars, and an *omnium gatherum* of gadgets in a canvas bag. We were told the thing would hold four, and would float like a cork—and "you *might* find it useful; anyhow, you can have it as a gift,"—so along it came. One look at the tortured dog-fight of waters which sprang at us when first we sighted the mouth of the gorge, and the folded cockle-shell had been put firmly and defi-

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nitely away with the other impedimenta in the stockade quarter-guard; and had stayed put. Wild horses will not drag from me the name of the maker and patentee who gave his name to the boat. But let us now, as we did then, use his initial and call it the 'B' boat; a titular appellation which later, and for obvious reasons, became an adjective.

Inevitably the boat had, all unconsciously, floated around on the slack water behind Baird's brain-wave; and now he reminded us of it. We adjourned to the quarter-guard, and, after some hectic work with ration-sacks and other dead-weight stuff, unearthed it and dragged it forth. Marriot—after the manner of Sappers the world over—specialising, at a moment's notice, in mental and material complications, fell on the bundles and, one by one, dissected them into myriads of components. You never saw such a mess. But, under his skilled eye which saw coherence in the most unlikely combinations, half an hour's strenuous work saw us finished with a job which resulted in a Shape. It had the soul and structure of a well-ribbed bisected umbrella; granted that the screws and nuts had been rightly assembled and would stay assembled, it had aspects of rigidity and trustworthiness; and, looked at through the corner of the half-closed left eye at a somewhat oblique angle, with considerable imagination it was credible as a boat.

The concourse of Gurks who, puzzled and inquisitive, had gathered round us were suddenly enlisted as honorary members of the job. In a moment a dozen of them had hoisted it shoulder-high among them; and the bunch, looking like nothing so much as a gigantic water-beetle, waddled out through the stockade gate and down the rocks

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to the river. They waded waist-deep into slack water, and, shouting cautions and objurgations at one another between great gusts of laughter, lowered it gently—and for the first time in its life—on to the element for which it had been made.

It floated. It floated like a cork, and on a perfectly even keel. More, it displaced so little water that the pressure of a finger-tip on a gunwale set it rocking. B'Jove: the man who sat in that boat would have to part his hair in the middle. . . .

"H'm," said Baird. "Well, I suppose it's a boat, all right. What about it? Shall we try?"

. . . . . .

I fixed things with the grizzled old Subadár. Apologetically, of course; for, deep down in a somewhat threadbare conscience, I could hardly suppress the feeling that this easy way of floating home was remarkably like desertion. Er—would he mind?—you see, we *had* to explore the river to find out if it were navigable, and, er—in fact, *would* he mind taking the column back by the jungle way while we, the sahibs, went by water?

Not he. He jumped at it.

Next morning, with the complete self-confidence of all Gurks in any jungle situation, he had gathered the men, turned their noses to the five homeward marches, and got them clear of the stockade almost before the rest of us were out of our blankets.

We turned to our boat.

The small garrison of the stockade—they who had dwelt, not too willingly, among the comparative fleshpots while we had been away in the wilds—now found their share in the scheme of energies; for they had to sit where they were and keep all things ship-shape for months till the open season

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started again and brought the returning column. It was they who helped us load up the 'B' which rode lightly to its painter in the eddies of the backwater below.

III.

We sat on the edge of the cliff and swopped notions. The pros and cons of the situation began to acquire aspects peculiar to the mentality and tendencies of each of us. Unballasted by the main purpose, the thing was gradually shaping itself into a vision in which the Soldier would be the central and only motive power, while the Sapper faced ahead in the bows and did a compass and theodolite traverse of the course of the river, and the Political, facing aft, trolled a line and spoon over the stern and pulled in mahseer. If the strictly utilitarian nature of the venture were not to degenerate into a hurrah's-nest, it was obvious that somebody would have to be firm. Great soggy lumps of tact began to make their appearance, and the meeting broke up in a welter of apologies all round.

We adjourned to the huts. There had been no pow-wow on what we were to take; and presently each man's notion of necessities began to pile up in a confused heap outside the door of his hut. We stared at the accumulation. We went to the edge and stared at the boat. Personal requirements, in a land of exiguous transport, being habitually a matter of extreme delicacy, discussion was obviously fraught with danger. We returned, in silence, each to his heap, to discover the irreducible minimum. The boat would hold four. We were three. The gear, *en bloc*, could therefore

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not exceed the weight of one man—say, two coolie loads.

Food, blankets, and armament; those were the fundamentals. To these, other matters gently accumulated; so that, in the end, we carted down the cliff a steady stream of blankets; tinned food; cooking pots; two kettles (one suspected of leaking); three revolvers and their ammunition; a scatter-gun and a hatful of buckshot cartridges—first-rate stuff for plastering a man when both you and he are in a hurry, and converging. Sounding-gear; log-books and papers; reading material; rod and fishing-gear; a rather depressed fowl in a small crate—put aside on the bank for piling on top of the rest, lest she be squashed, and afterwards forgotten and left behind. A pocket sextant and artificial horizon; four months' home mail and a considerable number of small parcels for three officers—all received at once, the day before, and only sketchily examined. A luminous compass; a telemeter; and what remained of our five-inch transit theodolite when the cliffs and jungles had quite done with it. Finally, a battered camera, almost light-tight, generally known as the 'guessing-box'—you never quite knew what was going to come out when the negative was developed,—and a wad of unused films.

All this disreputable junk we piled neatly, solidly, but, in the end, mountainously, in the narrow space in the bows.

The Gurks, six a side, steadied her while we climbed gingerly aboard. The Sapper for'ard; the Soldier amidships; and the Political in the stern, groping for the tiller lines. We settled ourselves very carefully on the gimcrack thwarts. We shipped the oars in the unexpectedly reliable-looking rowlocks. The Gurks let go. For a breath-

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less moment, I think we all three—I know that one of us did—waited for the whole crazy contraption to sink gently beneath the waters. Finding that nothing in particular happened, Marriot leaned over the gunwale, announced eight inches of freeboard, and hurriedly righted himself as the frail cockle-shell responded instantly to his change of position. Eight inches and no liberties.

All serene? Right-o. We dipped our oars and pulled out on to the placid reaches of the river; the laughing, knee-deep Gurks saluted, and retreated rapidly up the cliff to sit in a group and watch us steadily pulling down-stream. The stockade disappeared round a jungle-covered bend; we suddenly found ourselves alone—the first river survey in the annals of the Mishmi country.

. . . . . .

We began to take stock of our surroundings. The water ran placidly, but with a certain indefinable momentum and unhurried purpose, between two solid walls of green jungle which came right down to the river's edge, as uncompromising as the walls of a lock. Deep water, apparently, all round us, opaque with the sullen dark greenness of all jungle rivers. No change, as bend after bend and reach after reach opened out and fell behind. The boat rode well, and, as long as we sat firmly amidships and kept a steady stroke, on a perfectly even keel. But the least movement, or turn of the body to look ahead, and she lurched alarmingly; it was obvious that she was carrying her limit of freight.

Her details gradually impressed themselves; an inner and an outer skin of heavily painted canvas, stretched on thin ribs of steam-moulded and varnished ash, and protected from our hobnailed boots

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by a four-inch-wide plank running the length of the bottom. It was, very early, obvious that a firm push with a walking-stick would penetrate the canvas, and that we must treat the skin with the utmost respect if we wanted to stay above water. She was built in two independent sections which, rising to a bulkhead amidships and continuous each in its own watertightness, divided her into halves of which Baird and I occupied the stern, and Marriott and the baggage the bows. These halves were bolted together at top and bottom, and on these bolts alone depended our fore-and-aft rigidity. Her keel we remembered as a one-inch projection beyond the canvas of her bottom; later, our preoccupations whittled it down to vanishing point. One way and another, she was a miracle of how to combine portability with seaworthiness; but it was obvious that we could not take any liberties with her. Bluff in the bows and stern, she rode easily on the calm water, and, in spite of her margin of eight inches of freeboard, carried a deadweight four times as great as her own.

Would she steer? Within limits, she would steer. But, being built broad and bluff for buoyancy, we found that the only way to make her answer her helm was to drive her through the water till she nearly buried her snub nose under, and to keep on driving her. All this we discovered after it was too late to shift the deadweight of truck from her bows to what should have been its proper stowage in the stern; though where, in that case, would have been the room for the two pairs of fully occupied number nines, Baird's and mine, which struggled for precedence in the confined space, I fail to see. So, as I say, we were heavily down in the bows when we ought to have been

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getting all the grip we could out of the stern; and we steered like the Ark.

Meanwhile it was rather pleasant to drift, broadside on or stern-foremost as often as not, and feel that the river was doing all the work. There had been nothing and nobody on to which or whom we could shift the burden of effort, these months past, and the sensation was new. This, so to speak and as one might say, was money for jam.

The Sapper tried a sounding; once, twice, and again; and no bottom. He got half-way into something about 'getting shots,' and turned to reach for the prismatic compass; but there was that in the cold grey eye of Baird which nipped the intention off short; and it faded away into a vague rumble. Very early on, I think, a premonition warned us that we should have to confine our energies to one thing only—and that thing neither map-making nor fishing.

. . . . . .

As we slid out on to a longer reach than any we had yet covered, the clouds of the evening sky parted and let through such a riot of golden, scarlet, and emerald-green sunset as the eye had not seen, neither had it entered into the heart of man to conceive. The deep indigo waters turned to all the colours of the rainbow. The hush of the jungle, the silence and purpose of the solid water on which we floated, wrapped us round; and, for the moment, we seemed to swim above and below an indescribable sea of colour which enveloped us in a sublime elation no less than in utter peace. Three untidy men in a small boat. And, here or hereabouts, the dinginess, the long days and short commons of the past four months fell like an old garment from us, and, in a flash, we saw that our venture was an enterprise, a mighty lark, and an

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entirely good egg. I think that from this time forwards we rather ran riot.

We lugged the boat's nose round, where she drifted. Bow and stroke bent to it and fell into rhythm. Baird tautened the tiller-lines and held us straight for the central flash of the Turner halo, which made such a glory round our untidy Odyssey. The blunt bows heaved the water aside, breaking up the woven tapestry of shot and mingled hues beneath us. Was ever such a clash between the open Gates of Heaven in the sky above us and the works of man ?

We swung to it.

On and on.

The time went rollicking by. *We* didn't care. Camp for the night ? Who cared ! *All* together....

And now we were driving blindly through the dark ; sky, water, and jungle all one, in one welter of impenetrable greenish-black. Baird rose cautiously to full height and, " Easy all, you fellows ! " he called. " Hold her, quick ! " and he suddenly swung us broadside on ; and, lo and behold, there we were, our way gone and oars shipped, bobbing gently at the edge of a smooth long sandspit. We had all but piled ourselves up on a most providential night's camping ground.

IV.

Shelter for the night, and grub. No need to restate the ever-recurring requisites of nightfall. Lighting the lantern, we rapidly cleared the bows of its cargo, and, having neither tree-trunk for moorings nor the wherewithal to anchor, hauled our floating home high and dry up the loose warm sand of the bank.

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With odds and ends of driftwood, it was up to me to build a fire and to range the cooking pots and kettle; while Marriott and Baird, struck with a breezy idea, rolled the now empty tub over bottom-upwards, propped a gunwale on two oars, and, with blankets spread and loose gear stowed, had a useful night's shelter fixed before the pots had begun to sizzle.

As a camping ground the long thin sandspit was foolish. A bunch of junglis, emerging suddenly at the landward end, could have cut off all escape and driven us into the water before we could have launched the boat. A sudden rise of the river, and we should have been swimming like water-rats. But who cared? In the new-found peace of an effortless day, snug quarters, and full tummies, we rolled in our blankets, smoked, and talked, care-free, in the light of the lantern. All the same, an insistent thought would keep obtruding as to how Baird's boss, the Political Burra Sahib at Headquarters, would take it. It was, when all was said and done, an indefensibly madcap stunt—this and our leaving the men who, however safe, were yet on their own, and undiscoverable by us, some indeterminate number of miles to the eastward, quite unreachable in the pathless tangle.

The conversation lapsed into staccato monologues, which began to show an unprofitable gloom—cleared, in mid-stride, by the Sapper, who reached for his mail and unearthed the latest copy of 'Maga,' which, in a moment of typical human insight, he commenced to read aloud. We snuggled down into our blankets, sucked our pipes, and listened while he transported us to other scenes—to what scenes let those discover who, turning up the number for February 1912,

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may glance through the contents list. When he tired, the Political took up the tale, followed in turn by the Soldier, who, commenting on a passage, found his audience asleep, doused the glim, and crossed the border after them.

. . . . . .

The cook of the party, with that subconscious conscience which awakes all cooks, however reluctant, at first blush of dawn, crawled out and got the kettle going. Impelled, moreover, by an urge for fresh air; for whether it were the oilskin reek of the up-ended boat or a certain notable and distinguished smell of chimpanzee, which, living in a climate such as that of the Mishmis, he had early learnt to recognise in all close assemblies of expeditionary mankind, he was conscious of a most infernal head.

With the advent of tea, he got no answer to his shout. The other two may have remembered something hazy about the early bird getting the worm, but were probably equally convinced that it was the Early Christian who was got by the lion. Moreover, the dawn was damned chilly, and a solid mist wreathed the surface of the water and waved about in ghostly spirals near the sandspit; so that it was not until the heartening smell of bacon, bread, and beans, all fried together in a pan, came wafting across, that a couple of very sleepy officers, ungummed, crawled out, and took stock of an uninviting universe.

Fed, and in a better frame of mind, we broke camp, launched the 'B' carefully, held her steady, and loaded up. For two solid hours we pulled through mists which made ghostly the procession of dripping jungle on either hand. The weight of water slid glassily along. Presently the air cleared. The current seemed to have gathered an increasing

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momentum, and the jungle walls slipped past with unusual speed. "We shan't take long at this rate." said Baird. "Why, we must have come a good—Hullo! What's that? Listen, you beggars!" He raised his hand. We stopped rowing and listened, intently. An indeterminate, though increasingly identifiable, querulous sort of grumble arose ahead of us. We stared at each other.

"Waterfall?" at last ventured Marriott.

"Rubbish! Shut up! Can't be!" Our emphatic denial of any such possibility voiced our nervous conviction that something big and rather uncomfortable was, in fact, impending; and the Sapper shut up in a silence all the more impressive for his anxious watch on the face of Baird, who, the only one of us with a clear view forward, now rose somewhat apologetically to his feet and stared ahead.

Waterfall? . . .

Slowly and carefully he sat down again, flying that danger signal which we had learnt to recognise on many occasions in the past four months in this incomparable and fearless leader of explorations—a rather excited chuckle in the presence of something particularly damnable and unexpected. "Looks to me like . . . Yes, it is. *Rapids* coming, you fellows! Keep steerage-way on her. Pull like blazes!"

We bent to it. I remember distinctly the thought that if we *did* go over the edge of anything vertical, I should fall soft on Marriott behind me. Marriott, who in that case would have acted as foundation-stone for the superimposed expedition, did not say, nor has he since recorded, what he thought; but he pulled, as directed, like blazes.

The grumble rose to a growl. The growl increased to an angry roar. Baird's shoulders shook,

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but his laughter was inaudible. Quite indefensibly, I looked over my shoulder to see the smooth reach of what was rapidly becoming a dark-green mill-race suddenly upend itself a dozen yards ahead in breakers and tossing foam. "*Pull*, you blighters!" shouted Baird; and I bent to my oar again.

Wallop!—we were into it.

For one breathless second we seemed to stand on our tail, and the gear in the bows began to cascade. Then, with a seasick lurch we righted and leapt forward, and dived down, down a maelstrom of maddened water, black rocks projecting high or half-hidden in a cloud of spume, the boat bouncing along, thank goodness, where the water was strongest and therefore deepest, chucked from side to side with the rebound of the backwash off the larger rocks and, one way and another, behaving like a cork at the mercy of the raging waters. "*Pull*, you blighters!"—shouted in our faces above the hellish din—it was the only thing that could give us steerage-way—on and on, chucked off the thwart and back again, and hang on to your oar like grim death—trust the man at the stern, and *pull*—on and on. Till, with one last lurch, we sped out on to slack water, and, the impetus checking, spun round and round like a cockroach on a pin and dived nose-foremost into the slushy bank where Marriott, completely and effectually off his thwart for the time, clung to an overhanging branch and shook with helpless laughter.

Good *lord!* . . .

What the deuce had happened?

Between gusts of imbecile giggles we stared back at the spouting, raging, ladder-like thing down which we had been hurled, with a thankfulness all jumbled up in wonder that the boat had

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lived through it and had, apparently, not shipped a capful.

Gingerly, we felt about and took stock. Nothing missing. The pinnings of rowlocks, tiller-lines, stretchers all present and correct. The connections of bow-half to stern-half were at the keel, so we could not examine that; but all above water appeared serene and hunkydory. We suddenly developed a pride in the frail thing that had so unexpectedly brought us through, and a sensation of "let 'em *all* come!" supervened. If she would bounce down a maniac escalator like that, she would live through anything.

. . . . . .

We re-stowed the gear, tidied up generally, and pulled out our pipes. The last chuckle died out of us as the situation dawned. Please goodness, there would be no more such hazards; but, for good or for ill, now, we were booked. There was no turning back. A portage being impossible through the solid jungle, which came right down to the edge of the water, it was equally impossible—failing foothold and a supernatural power of standing against the weight of water—to drag the boat, even if empty, up the rapids again. Come fair, come foul, on we must go and carry the business through.

It was the mercy of heaven that we had neither swamped, nor stove in our flimsy bottom. The extraordinary buoyancy of the cockle-shell had saved us from shipping any water; but, one puncture, and we most certainly would have sunk. Our floating home would have vanished and we should have been stranded in the country of those infernal junglis. Here lay the rub. Personally, in spite of my job, I am a man of peace, especially when it is a matter of the strictly inoffensive

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heathen, and I will do my level best at any time to beat anybody up the Olive Branch. But not, most emphatically not, in the case of the jungli. He is best studied when dead; and certified dead by a doctor lest there should be any mistake about it. He is as clever as a cartload of monkeys; as mean as a crooked sixpence; without discipline, decency, or loyalty to his fellows; and, while capable of the most devilish mischief from behind a bush, is devoid of even the saving grace of physical courage. When to this is added the fact that the inevitable and messy death which may be expected from one of his poisoned arrows is the result less of the poison on them than of the unprintable dirt in which they, he, and all his possessions are kept, I shall be understood when I say that he is the Complete Caitiff, and that I sincerely hope the Recording Angel hears me say it and makes a note of it.

We picked up our oars and swung our nose round again; out across the yeasty water of the basin and into the main current. In the windings of the river, the inequality of the current, and the varying pace of our pulling, we had long ago lost all sense of distance and orientation. The Sapper had long given up any thought of keeping bearings; in our condition of remarkably unstable equilibrium, he stood about as much chance of making a theodolite, or even compass, survey of the tortuous convolutions of the river's course as . . . never mind. He had a fluent gift of picturesque hyperbole, had Marriott; but even that hardly excused the startling simile with which his pent-up and thwarted professional yearnings suddenly described the situation.

On and on we pulled, borne on an even and steady current; making what appeared to be a

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good six miles an hour. No sign or trace of further adventure. We snatched a cold lunch and pulled between mouthfuls. Baird, accustomed to mushy enthronements in the jungle, began to feel his seat in the stern hard, and doubled a blanket beneath him. On and on. That must have been the one rapid in the river; and the Sapper grew knowledgeable about faults, rock-strata, and other unusual cross-country interruptions whose repetition were not to be expected.

It was some time shortly after this that, quite unconsciously, I began to note an increase in our pace. There was a feel about the water, too, when the oar dipped. . . . The Sapper—had he noticed it, too?—tailed off into silence. What he was thinking must have been visible in his face to Baird, who, rising once more to his feet, stared ahead, and presently announcing, quite quietly, "Here's another!" sat down.

"Two of 'em, b'jove!"

"What, two rapids?"

"No, two channels. Now which the deuce shall we take?"

In a moment the new danger struck us all of a heap. With two channels, one must be right and the other wrong. They could not possibly hold equal water; and water was what we needed. Shape or behaviour, we now knew, mattered little; but water we simply must have to float us, with no risk of scraping the bottom. From our position near water-level, even with Baird once more standing and straining his eyes, nothing could be guessed. There was an island in the middle, the clumpy rocks of which grew momentarily clearer, and an obvious divergence of water right and left. "Keep her going!" shouted Baird, as we swept down in an increasing giddiness of speed; and, by the

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mercy of heaven, he forgot to steer. The weight of the water took us, and, as the island flashed past, we found ourselves whirling down a long slope of glassy and unencumbered water, and shooting far out into the pool below before we lost way. Even then I don't think we realised that the river itself had decided the question for us, and had carried us helplessly down the main channel.

Wheew-w. *That's* all right, then!

We began to think small beer of rapids. If there were any more, and all as easy as that—" I say. How about your strata, Sapper?"

"Hunggk!"—or noise to that effect.

. . . . . .

We pulled steadily for an hour, and an hour more. The featureless procession of giant trees and thick scrub swept past with a monotonous sameness. Nothing to mark progress—and yet a comforting sense of getting on with it, and at some quite unexpected moment possibly rounding a corner and finding ourselves on the long open reach fronting base-headquarters. Or, again, we might have days of this sort of thing. There was absolutely no telling. We were jungle-thin and hard; and, anyhow, there was no great labour in it. On and on; this was easy; this was—" Oh, *damn!*" Baird, the lighthearted, suddenly sobered and broke into mixed invective. "Here's *another* of the beastly things!"

V.

This time everybody's judgment went all to blazes. At Baird's insistent urging, we pulled our hardest and best. I think he must have felt him-

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self growing knowledgeable about these traps; anyhow, conning the impending trouble, he suddenly grew decisive, and, after the manner of two-fisted He-men, took charge definitely and emphatically. There should be no more waiting passively on events—no, by jingo! Rapids be blowed: *he* knew all about rapids, *he* did!—and heaved on his port tiller-line. We lurched over left-wards, and, straightening out, skimmed with decision across to where a left-hand passage surged over the lip of the descent. Like a horse gone gay, we pranced over the lip, sure and certain of a safe and emphatic passage to—Oh, *lor!*

For, looking to my left as I sat, there—as I might have guessed our luck would have it—I saw the main bulk of the water hurling itself down the principal channel twenty yards off, while we, irrevocably committed, found ourselves scraping, bump-bumping on our entirely inadequate keel, down a millrace only a couple of feet deep. "Now we've done it! *Now* we've torn it, m'lads!" I remember muttering, and pulled till I nearly split my buttons. "Why the blazes couldn't we—Crumbs! that was a bad 'un! Hi! Hold tight!" —a shattering bump shot us off our seats. The boat lurched broadside-on, caught on something quite decisive, and began to heel over. The water creamed against her exposed side. It was a matter of seconds. With extraordinary unanimity all hands and the cook suddenly disembarked, head-foremost and by the nearest road. I remember the sudden gasp of the chill, the sudden violent strength of the millrace, as I hit the water, and, with the instinct born of polo to hang on to the reins at all costs, righted myself and grabbed for the gunwale, to find the remainder of the ship's company had been smitten with the same impulse.

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The boat, suddenly freed of three-quarters of her cargo, rose like a cork, and, closely accompanied by three breathless, blasphemous, and partly submerged officers, proceeded down the tearing cataract at a pace of knots towards the pool below.

And then it was that the Brothers Bimbo presented their world-renowned acrobatic stunt—house full and crowds turned away nightly,—bringing off a simultaneous double-handspring over a chin-high gunwale two inches thick, and landing all together from three different directions in a heap on the narrow floor-board of the coracle. Whoo-*oop!*

Barely had we sorted ourselves out and, dripping like retrievers, got the oars going again, when there was a warning shout from Baird, and, breakers roaring, we dived over the edge of another rapid barely separated from the first. This time, indeed, we hit the main current, and hit it with a wallop—one long rampage of tortured and deafening noise and wildly tossing whirlpool. Caught all abroad, we went down stern foremost, and, completely metagrobolised, continued to pull like blazes as though we were nose foremost—Baird gripping the tiller-lines like grim death, bent double, and helpless with rib-racking laughter. Even when we had shot far out into the pool we found ourselves still pulling up-stream and in danger of charging back once more into the welter of foam out of which we had just escaped. Baird, with his last vestige of sanity, pulled hard on a tiller-rope and spun us back into the pool, where we continued to pull and to gyrate till, tension over, we ceased fire, drew a long hiccupping breath, and collapsed.

. . . . . .

We took stock.

We were still afloat. Undoubtedly we floated.

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But our freeboard was now only a hopeful two inches. In that maniac double charge down the shallow and deep millraces, something must have happened to reduce our buoyancy; and yet there was no more water in the boat than had dripped from us when we did the handspring stunt. Puzzled, we took to the oars again. Immediately the solution was plain. We had torn our outer skin, and the compartments between the outer and the inner were now flooded. A liquid gurgle, as of a lovesick sponge, assuming there to be such a thing, raced from end to end beneath our feet.

Ah, then did we cry aloud and promise to be good and never do it again, please—as near panicked as might be. For now it was obvious that, if we wished to avoid the choice between a liquid and a sticky end, we could afford no more bumps or rapids. Given smooth water, we could, though precariously and with infinite caution, float to destination. But if we hit the slightest thing, it was all up. We rode as heavily as a log, the boat barely answering her tiller when we pulled our hardest. Visions of jettisoning the cargo in the bows were dismissed: an extra couple of inches of buoyancy would make little difference. We pulled ahead in silence. All would be well. We had not come as far as this only to—"*Hi!*" a sudden yelp from Marriott; "*she's bust!* Look out!!"—and we saw him dive on to the floorboards and slam the palm of his hand against a thin jet of water which spouted into the boat. The inner skin, not designed for such things, had given way under the pressure of water from below, and, like the fabled Dutch boy and the dyke, the Sapper's caulking hand was the only thing between us and submersion.

He hung on grimly, but, cramped and twisted,

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could not stay there for ever. "Here, soldier, you hang on to it for a moment." Reaching over, I slapped my hand firmly on to the spouting hole, while Marriott rapidly stripped off boot and sock and resumed his place on the thwart. "Right; I can manage now," and his bared foot took up the caulking. More, he could row and yet hold the leak; and presently the oars were got going again in a strained silence, broken only by Marriott. He who, though, as a rule, blessed with the inestimable gift of wise and wide silences, yet had, on occasion, a greater command of picturesque emphasis than ever came out of Flanders, now announced that sooner than commit himself again to a particularised floating umbrella, he would put to sea in a wash-tub and sail at the tail of a qualified shirt!

We offered no comment—nor was there anything quite adequate to offer when, five minutes later, the oilskin beneath Baird's seat gave way simultaneously in three places, and he sprang to his feet, nearly swamping the boat for good and all.

Here was an end to all things. Filling at a measure of quarts, which presently became gallons, we pulled like men demented to the nearest bank, and, jumping ashore, trod the last of that substantive and adjective 'B' boat deep below the surface, where it sank in a swirl of bubbles.

The dripping crew grabbed the projecting roots of the trees on the almost vertical bank, pulled themselves clear of the water, and stared at one another.

I don't think we quite panicked. The packed hours and minutes since dawn still held us. But a moment's reflection would have put us straight into the dumps. Lost, foodless, soaked, half-clothed, and unarmed, we faced a pathless jungle

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full of possibilities and with only a vague notion of north hidden in a drive of cold rain, which now came down to add to our other joys. In moments like this, one thinks of drivelling details; and I remember a momentary panic at the idea that the shot-gun cartridges would get soaked—where another second's consideration would have brought the reality of complete loss in a whirling and apparently bottomless pool, not only of cartridges but of gun and revolvers as well. As for the rest of the truck . . . lost. B'jove, *we*'re lost; come to think of it! How the . . .

"*M'n-yang! N'yang! Yang-yang-yang-yang-ya-yangg!!*"—a cascade of yapping barks, swelling to a pack chorus, burst suddenly into our dawning consciousness of imminent disaster. Barks, yaps, and barks—finishing on that well-recognised yelp as the well-flung stick catches the yapper in mid-oratorio and stops the performance. The Political scrambled up the last six feet of bank, and, with his habitual knack of doing the right thing even in the unsettlement of consternation, cocked one eyebrow and half a bloodshot eye over the edge. Instantly he ducked, and over his face stole just that indescribable expression which we were to see, years later, on the face of the Sniper in that delicious Academy picture, "Got 'im!" Slowly his fore-finger crooked, and he beckoned us up. Slowly we contributed an eyebrow and half an eye apiece; slowly we drew back and shared among ourselves a repetition of the sniper's expression. For there, on an open clearing, lay a full jungli village—piccanins, pigs, fowls, all complete, and a useful-looking savage standing on the *chang* of the nearest hut rating the departing dogs which had scented us.

Lummy! *This* solves it all right. Torn it, in

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fact! Jungli village; panicky inhabitants quick on the draw; scores of miles from anywhere; no useful Gurks with us, and we, unarmed, about as fit to make an impressive first appearance as a collection of rag-and-bone merchants.

Baird, of course, solved it. While justifiable scare was still on the edge of claiming us all, he stood bolt upright, clambered over the edge of the bank, and walked straight towards the jungli, ourselves following. The jungli ducked like a shot rabbit, and dived into the black doorway of the hut—we after him. Before anyone could draw bead or bowstring on us, we were making conciliatory noises at one yard's range to the owner, who, thrown off his balance, showed plainly that he carried in full blast a panic which had all but been ours.

. . . . . .

Outside, on the *chang*. "Hódiya," said we, giving the jungli equivalent of the haven where we would be. The Lord only knew how far off it was, but these chaps might know. . . .

"*Héh*?"

"Hódiya. Hódiya!"

The assembling crowd of junglis took it up. "Hódiya. Eh-*hé*. Hódiya!"

"Hódiya," repeated Baird; and, bursting into Assamese, "kíman tháru ásse?"

Vain hope; he would be as likely to understand the language as he would Choctaw.

To our intense surprise, the jungli's animal equivalent of intelligence, hidden somewhere under his left ear, emerged and crept slowly across his grimy face. He turned left, raised his arm, and pointed—as these people point—with his flat hand held up, rather like Mussolini's salute, at an angle of forty-five. "Hódiya." . . .

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"Oh, lord! Looks like 3 P.M. by the sun he's pointing at. A full day's march for these folk; more like three for us" . . . and still he pointed.

Rapidly, we took counsel. If we stayed, we were as good as done. Quite unarmed, we should stand about as much chance of surviving a night in a village like this as a celluloid cat in . . . "shut *up*, Sapper; it's all *right*; let's think."

But if we let this chap, as he seemed willing enough to do, lead us—again, he might, and probably would, conduct us into a trap where he and his unspeakable friends could do us in comfortably and out of sight—if not to-day, then to-morrow or the next day. Baird settled it: "Can't stay here, anyhow; let's risk it."

He approached the jungli, while Marriott unshipped a puttee and wound it round and round his bare foot.

"Hódiya. Hódiya!" shouted Baird, and waved an arm.

"Eh-*héh*! Hódiya. Hódiya!" brayed the savage.

The two stood yelping "Hódiya!" at each other till the jungli, grabbing his bow and giving a hitch to his quiver, jumped off the *chang*, we after him. A confused mob followed us to the edge of the clearing. Our guide dodged ahead, and we plunged into the recesses of the pathless jungle. No grub; nothing to eat till we got there; no blankets; goodness only knew how far, or whether this chap would do the dirty on us. . . . No very happy party.

In the first hundred yards we had to stop. We were all in hard condition, but nobody but a jungli can keep up a rapid pace in the depths of an almost solid cat's-cradle of every conceivable gripping and tripping obstacle. We panted and dripped.

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"Hódiya! Hódiya!" yapped the jungli, and stabbed forward with his hand: he seemed in a devil of a hurry to get on.

We stumbled and scrambled forward.

Denser and denser grew the matted greenery.

Suddenly the jungle thinned. We dived abruptly out of the tangle on to a well-kept lawn; and there, twenty yards away, the Burra Sahib half rose from behind his table on the verandah and stared at us in a concentration which almost immediately burst into peals of Homeric laughter. Well he might; for we must have looked like nothing on earth. And, realising in a flash that our three days' journey of starvation and exhaustion in an escape from getting our throats cut had suddenly materialised into a two hundred yards belt of thick jungle and a perfectly harmless village of Headquarter dependants, we added our loud but somewhat self-conscious contribution to the din.

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